

# LOVAT DICKSON'S MAGAZINE

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*Edited by P. Gilchrist Thompson*

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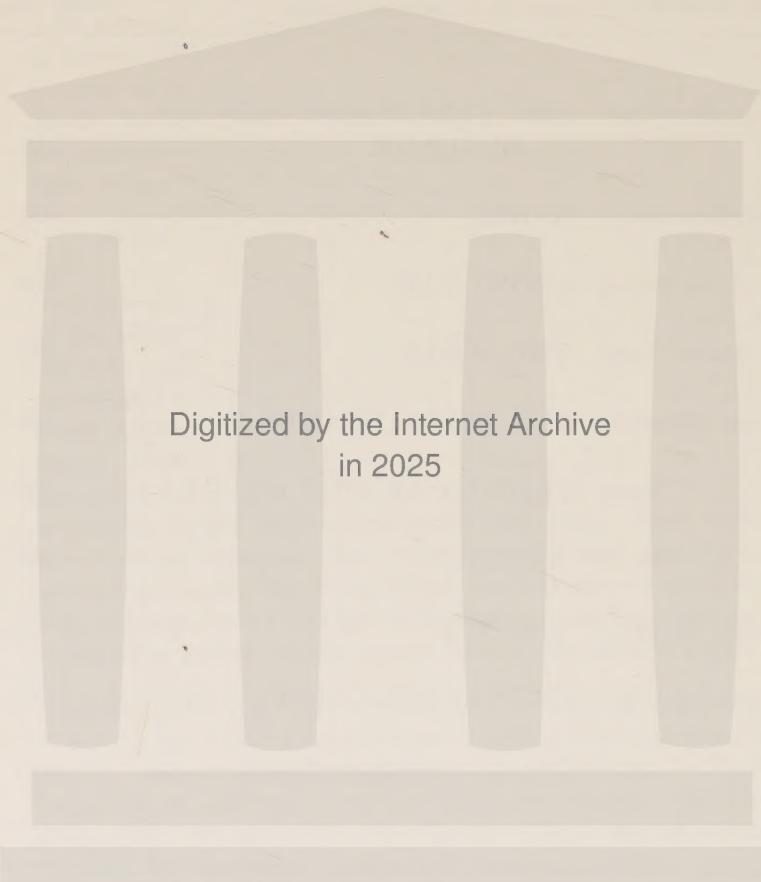
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## *Editor's Note*

Since November last, when the first number of LOVAT DICKSON'S MAGAZINE appeared, the Editor has received a most gratifying number of letters from appreciative readers. Among them have been a few frankly abusive, and others written more in sorrow than in anger. We set out with a definite purpose. Without identifying ourselves with any particular school of writing, we have selected out of two thousand or more short stories submitted to us those we considered representative of the best being written today. That we have succeeded to some extent our rapidly growing circulation shows, though we are far from wishing to judge success from circulation figures alone. Criticism, however, is always interesting. We invite more of it, and hope in a later issue to reply to some of the points raised. Already interesting deductions can be made from the variety and quality of the material which has passed through our hands. In our January issue, for instance, we commented on the difficulty of finding good humorous stories. A successor to Anstey has not yet appeared. Here is an interesting field for speculation. Has the present generation of writers lost something of the spontaneity and self-assurance of earlier days?

A. G. MACDONELL

# *The thirty-one men of Buzuluk*

*A True Story*

THE Government of Samara was scorching. Day after day the orange disc of the sun blazed down through the dust-clouds that eddied slowly hither and thither as an occasional current of air moved fitfully and for a moment. The air was full of dust, and the dust was warm. The earth, the splendid black mother-earth of the Ukraine, was hard and bare, and full of wide cracks. The Volga, half its ordinary breadth, broke into little spurts of steam as it rippled against the sun-heated girders of the great iron railway-bridge at Sizran, and a haze hung gloomily over the horizons of the doomed land. For it was the summer of 1921, and every man and woman knew that the Greatest Famine of all was coming, inexorably, inevitably. They had even given up staring at the pitiless, flawless turquoise above them in the desperate search for a rain-cloud. Even if rain came now, it would be too late. The crops were already burned to stubble and match-wood. Nothing can save them. The black Ukrainian earth, which can grow and ripen a rich corn-crop in three months from sowing-time to reaping-time, was starved for water. During the winter before, the snows had

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failed. There had been only a pitiful downfall, and so the reservoir of spring water which lies, so thick, and so soft, and so dazzling, across the steppes all winter and waits for the spring thaw, had not been filled. The spring floods had been little larger than puddles. There had been no torrents of swirling waters through the birch-woods, or lapping of waves against the railway-embankment of the Trans-Caspian. Everything was moist only, instead of flooded.

Then the spring rains failed too, and everything went dry. Then the early summer rains failed, and the valley of the Volga knew that it was doomed.

The Poles and the Jews, transplanted to the Volga in 1915, when the Tsarist armies evacuated and destroyed East Poland under the relentless drive of von Mackensen, at last began to move westwards, back to their old homes. Those who went by train left all their possessions behind them, except what they could carry in their hands. The hardier, more adventurous ones packed all that they could on to a cart and set out to walk a thousand miles to the Polish frontier. But the rest had nowhere to go, and they stayed on in the scorching valley and waited for death.

They had not long to wait.

There were still a few horses left, a very few, after the armies had swept backwards and forwards across the steppes during the Revolutionary and counter-Revolutionary wars. Kolchak, requisitioners from Denikin, Reds, Green peasant bands, Czecho-Slovakians cutting their way home from prison-camps in Siberia, independent guerilla leaders, all had taken what they could find. But some of the horses had been hidden in the forests, and now there was a new use for them. There was no longer any agricultural work for them to do—no carting of magnificent, dark sheaves of corn to the reapers, no winnowing-fans to tug at, no round-and-

round, slow, grinding-stones to pull, no farmers to take to the market where the harvests were sold. But there were the death-carts to haul through the baking streets of the towns. "Put out your dead" was the melancholy cry, echoing mournfully down the broad streets lined on each side with low, two-story wooden houses that had once been painted every year, gay green or blue or pink. It was more than seven years since any of them had been painted, and they wore an indescribable air of dinginess, dilapidation and despair.

Evening after evening, the air was so thick with heat that even the last mangy cur-dogs lay panting in the shade, and gave up the feverish hunt for food that was their final activity in life before they, too, were seized and devoured. And evening after evening the death-carts went their slow rounds, and the doors of the dingy bungalows opened and the people put out their dead.

At last the summer of brass and turquoise scorched its way into the gentler month of September, and those who were still alive marvelled at their own endurance, and began to think of the winter.

It was in September that Nicolai Nicolaievitch Davidov had his inspiration. He saw a way of escape from starvation, and it was a way of escape that would make him rich as well. Davidov was an intelligent man, a peasant farmer who had seen his opportunity in 1917 and had shot his landlord and his landlord's wife and three young children, and had then sat down in ambush to wait for his landlord's heir, an officer in the anti-aircraft corps serving on the Rumanian front, who would soon be drifting home from the disintegration of the front-lines from Riga to the banks of the Dniester and the shores of the Black Sea. In January, 1918, the son and heir came back, on foot across the snow, in peasant's

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disguise. But Davidov recognized him, and he shot him from beyond a wood-stack that had been piled up for refuelling the Trans-Caspian engines. After that, Davidov became the richest and most prominent member, after the Commissar from Moscow, in the Soviet of the town of Buzuluk, in the Government of Samara.

But even rich and prominent members of local Soviets must have bread to eat, and Davidov's well-ploughed crops had been scorched by the red-hot sun just as impartially as the small scratchings in the soil of the humblest of the peasants.

So Davidov made his plan, and he collected, gradually, with cautious care, after much sounding and sifting and testing, thirty friends who might be disposed to join. None of the thirty was a member of the Buzuluk Soviet, for the Soviet was set very strongly against anything that smelt of profiteering. And Davidov's plan was large-scale profiteering. He proposed to his thirty friends that they should sell everything they possessed, houses, land, horses, oxen, camels, sledges, jewellery, which they had acquired in the early days of 1918, when the big houses were being sacked, Bokhara rugs, ikons, spades, ploughs, fragments of Gobelin tapestry, pigs, everything, and then go off to the south to buy flour. A pound of flour was worth a score of Bokhara rugs, or a dozen bits of pearl-embroidered embroidery from Merv. For a pound of flour would go to the making of a hundred loaves if it was carefully used, and mixed with bark of trees, and ground nuts, and grass, and rye-stubble. People were living, just living, upon stubble mixed with clay. They would give everything they possessed for a cake of stubble mixed with clay and a powdering of real, white flour.

All this Davidov explained in urgent, eloquent whispers to the men who sat sprawling on the floor, or leaning against

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the walls, or sitting on the huge unlit stove in Davidov's kitchen. "Look at my great carpet," Davidov unconsciously slipped into a preroration, "which I took that night that the old Count's sledges fell into our ambush when he was flying to Novorossisk. It is worth ten thousand of the roubles of the Tsar——"

"Hush!" came the hiss of many voices.

"But can I eat it?" went on Davidov passionately. "Can I make tea of it? Can I drink it? Come, then, to Tashkent and buy flour. Shall we go comrades?"

And so it was agreed. For weeks there was a steady sale. As it was an utterly insane time to sell, for the rouble was plunging catastrophically down its path of millions, and a bundle of notes might be worth on Wednesday exactly a half of what it had been worth on the Monday, there were plenty of buyers, and the thin cattle, especially, fetched large sums. The carpets and the embroideries and the jewellery were snapped up by the foreign journalists who had come out to describe the Famine, particularly by the American journalists who were swarming in the Volga valley at that time, and by the end of October the thirty-one friends had amassed a considerable sum in dwindling roubles, and, far more important, quite a number of rock-like dollar-bits. Then they packed a few belongings into sacks or old battered suit-cases, and unobtrusively stole out of the town in ones and twos, and boarded trains for the east. A few lucky ones managed to fight their way into the first Trans-Caspian express that came along—the great Moscow-Tashkent train—but the rest had to make their way in slow trains, or hide in goods-wagons, as far as Orenburg. At Orenburg they had to wait for more expresses, and it was not until the end of November that they all met at the appointed rendezvous, the railway terminus at Tashkent. Then they appointed the last day of the year for

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their rendezvous for the return journey, and then they scattered in parties in the search for white flour.

The ancient walled city, and the new quarter with its broad boulevards and handsome buildings, were a pleasant change after Buzuluk and its death-carts, and the orchards and vine-yards and many trickling streams were a vast improvement on the parched, cracked earth which they had left behind, still sweltering in the hot sun of an exceptionally brilliant late autumn. But Tashkent, for all its soft and warm exterior, is a dangerous place for men of the north, and within a week two of the travellers from Buzuluk had eaten a surfeit of melons and had died of the last final fling of the cholera-germ of the year 1921. The epidemic, which had raged in the summer, had almost raged itself out, and these two men were almost the last victims of the year. Another danger, which ought to have been foreseen, was the incredible audacity of the bandits outside the town. Turkestan is a long way from Moscow, and the strong arm of the Central Government did not reach more than a couple of miles from a railway line in those early days of the Revolution. A party of six of the flour hunters were caught by a swooping band of mounted Turkomans at the very edge of the new quarter, within hail of sentries, and cut down to a man and stripped of everything. Had it been on the outskirts of Buzuluk, they would have been on their guard. There were always bandit alarms in Buzuluk, especially between the time when the famine drove men to desperation and the time when it so sapped their strength that not even banditing was possible, and everyone went about the open country cautiously, and in large parties. But down in sunny, gentle Tashkent, where wine could be bought, and cherry blossom flowered in spring-time upon the boulevards, they had not expected the sudden foray.

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There was only one other casualty among the profiteers before the last day of December. One of them lost his pocket-book containing his identification-papers. He was stopped late one night by a Soviet policeman and questioned. Being unable to produce his documents, he was at once drafted as a carrier into an expedition which was leaving in a few days time to survey the winter sledge-routes from Tarmez, on the Oxus, in the Bokhara Government, across the mountains into Afghanistan.

But in spite of these casualties, there were twenty-two men left and they came, filtering gradually, into the big waiting-hall of the railway-station on the 31st of December. Fifteen of them had two large sacks each, two large sacks of the finest, the whitest, the softest flour that ever was milled. The other seven, stronger and more ambitious than the others, had managed to struggle to the station with three sacks each. Altogether the total was fifty-one, and fifty-one sacks of white flour would buy a very large slice of the whole province of Buzuluk.

But they were not so foolish as to imagine that they would reach home with the whole fifty-one. There was still the problem of securing places on the Moscow express. And still more difficult would be the problem of getting permission to take the sacks on to the passenger train with them. It was no use attempting to travel by goods train, for the snows had been coming down steadily now for weeks on the Borsuki Desert, above the Aral Sea, and at the head waters of the Jaxartes, and the authorities were not running any more goods-trains till the spring. It was hard enough to get the Trans-Caspian express through, without bothering about goods.

The competition for places on the express was frantic. The sleeping-car, confiscated from the Wagon-Lit Company

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in 1918, was reserved for Soviet officials ; the second-class was filled with travellers who had a personal influence with officials, such as engineers, railwaymen, N.C.O.'s of the Red Army, surveyors, and various technical experts. The third-class carriages were open to all who could obtain permission to travel. And even after the permission had been obtained, there was still the military guard to get round.

But the twenty-two men of Buzuluk had a powerful weapon. It cost them ten bags of flour to buy permission to travel from the stationmaster at Tashkent, and five more to be allowed to take their precious merchandise into a passenger train, and three more to square the soldiers. Then they lay down on the floor of the waiting-room among the tattered, dirty, squalid crowd of Kalmucks, Tartars, Kirghiz, Bokharans, Khivans, Turkomans, Khokandians, Afghans, Chinese, and men of a dozen other races, to wait for a train to start.

After a week an engine arrived from somewhere—nobody seemed to know exactly where—that was sufficiently powerful to pull the express, and the stampede for seats began. In spite of all the careful bribing there was a muddle, and four of the travellers were left behind as the train jerked out. They ran desperately after it and scrambled on to the running-board of the sleeping-car, and were shot down by the military guard, always vigilant to prevent peasants from attacking Soviet officials.

The engine was a powerful one, and the oil, which came from Baku in tankers across the Caspian to Krasnovodsk, and thence by rail through Merv, Bokhara, and Samarcand, to Tashkent, drove it along powerfully until the train stuck in a snowdrift on the Borsuki, after fighting its way against a driving blizzard for miles out of Kazalinsk.

The train was stuck for eight days, and on the fourth day of the eight, several of the flour-collectors began to complain of

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headaches. On the fifth day they developed the full and deadly blast of typhus. The cold weather of winter which killed the cholera brought on the typhus, and the crowded, filthy, waiting-room at Tashkent had been a forcing-ground for the fatal, germ-carrying lice. By the time that the snow-ploughs had come down from Karabutak, and the line was clear again, seven of the party had been hastily thrown out upon the snow. The ground was too hard for digging graves, and the wolf and the raven are quite adequate undertakers.

Eleven of the party were left, and they had thirty-three sacks of flour. At Karabutak the train halted for two days. The oil-engine had only enough fuel for the return journey to Tashkent. Once out of the radius of the Baku oil-supplies, it would be completely immobilized, and the train-superintendent, and station-masters, and engine-driver, who allowed an oil-engine to be immobilized would have much to explain to the railway-Commissars. The best that would happen to them would be an order to report for burial-duty in the famine-area ; the worst would be loss of their food-tickets, and that would mean inevitable death by starvation.

So the oil-burning engine picked up a south-bound train and went back to Kazalinsk, and the express had to wait for a wood-burner. During the wait, another of the men died of typhus, and the military guard was changed. The new military guard had to be given five sacks of flour.

After Karabutak, progress was painfully slow. The wood was often damp, and sometimes the stacks that were piled at intervals along the line were found to have been looted, or burnt by the roaming bands of White ex-officers who still infested the forests and did what mischief they could. Often it was difficult to maintain a head of steam sufficient to drag the heavy train along.

Between Ak Tiubinsk and Orenburg there was a deter-

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mined night attack upon the train by a large, wild band of marauders. A truck had been hauled on to the line and tipped on its side, and a small iron bridge over a ravine had been mined with some sort of home-made infernal machine. The train had been brought to a standstill, but the fuse was a few seconds late and, instead of blowing up the engine, it only destroyed the coupling between the last two coaches and wrecked two compartments. Six of the men from Buzuluk and sixteen bags of flour were torn to ribbons by the explosion, and when the last two coaches were abandoned, the four survivors had to buy places in the intact part of the train with another five bags of flour. There were now only seven bags left.

Davidov was one of the four, and his dark mournful eyes hardly ever left the fatal sacks which had cost them so much. But there were no lamps in the third-class carriages, and no one could afford to buy candles, so that, during the long nights, he could stare and stare at the place in the corner, where he knew the sacks were lying, but he could not see them. And so, on the night of the bandits' attack he could not see the hole in one of them that a stray bullet had torn, and in the shivering cold of the early morning there were seven sacks left, but only six of them contained flour. The seventh was empty, and it required no detective to point out the gap in the floor-boards of the carriage, through which the flour had trickled down on to the line, like the sand of a gigantic hour-glass.

Twenty miles south of Orenburg there was a sudden thaw. The temperature rose thirty degrees in a single night, and in the morning the wood-stacks beside the line were dripping with melted snow. There was no possibility of maintaining a head of steam in the engine sufficient to draw the over-crowded and overloaded train, and the only thing to do was to uncouple the engine and send it on alone to Orenburg for

a supply of dry fuel. Very slowly and jerkily the engine struggled away, across the interminable steppes of the Uralsk.

This last delay was fatal, for the food of the third-class passengers was running low. They had been living, since they left Tashkent, on melons and dried sunflower-seeds, and such small supplies of black bread and horseflesh and dried river-fish as they had been able to buy at wayside-stations in exchange for the lumps of rock-salt which every traveller from Turkestan brings northwards with him. Rock-salt was a far more valuable commodity than a catastrophically-falling rouble. But in that dreary waste of the Uralsk, where a man might ride for thirty miles and see no human habitation, rock-salt and rouble were equally valueless, and the passengers began to murmur about the men with the bags of flour. Late that night a handful of desperate men attacked the compartment in which Davidov and his three survivors were sleeping, and before the military guard could restore order, two of them had been stabbed to death, the third seriously wounded, and only Davidov was unhurt, standing grimly over the last bag. The other five bags were distributed in surreptitious triumph among the assailants.

At last the engine returned, and the journey was resumed. At Orenburg the wounded man was taken off the train, and a sledge was requisitioned to take him to hospital. But he died before the hospital was reached.

Davidov was left alone now, gaunt, haggard, wild-eyed, like a wolf that is fighting for its life.

At last the green roofs of Buzuluk, and the green and silver domes of the churches, and the skeleton of the wooden bridge across the river, which the Czechs had destroyed, were silhouetted against the pale, leaden gloom of the afternoon sky. The frost had come down again, and it was snowing,

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and an icy wind was blowing up from the Cossack country. In the far, white, distance, a caravan of camel-sledges was plodding slowly across the snow, like a tiny, black caterpillar.

Davidov was home again.

He staggered into the waiting-room with his sack of flour, and a great wave of sleep enveloped him. It was warm in the waiting-room, and there were two miles of snowy tracks between the station and the town. So he lay down in a corner and pillow'd his head upon his sack, and fell into a slumber, so sweet, and so deep, that he felt nothing when the thief gently lifted his head and stole the sack of flour and crept out of the waiting-room.

D. KOSZTOLÁNYI

## *Babel*<sup>\*</sup>

THE other day at a party—said Cornelius Esti—someone told me that one should never go to a country without knowing its language. I thoroughly agreed with him. As I am not an Englishman, I take more interest in people than in their surroundings. If I hear strangers speak without understanding what they say, I feel that I am either spiritually deaf, or that I am watching a silent film without music or titles. This sort of thing gets on my nerves and bores me beyond measure.

Though I then agreed with our friend, it came to my mind later on that perhaps the English are right. It must be “great fun” to travel in a foreign country when one is left cold by the sounds coming from moving lips, and to respond with that curious dumb stare when one is addressed. Now, at least, I began to understand the meaning of the words “splendid isolation.” What a wonderful feeling of independence and irresponsibility it gives us! Suddenly we feel like a baby under guardianship. There awakens in us a sort of inexplicable faith towards grown-ups, who must be wiser than we. We let them talk and act while we remain passive. Then we accept everything blindly. The adventure I am

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\*Translated from the Hungarian by A. de Hegedus

## BABEL

going to tell you was unique to me, for, as you know, I speak nine languages. It happened when I was on my way to Turkey, and was obliged to travel through Bulgaria. I spent only twenty-four hours in the latter. There, this curious adventure, which I feel I must tell you, happened. I should hate for you to miss it and, after all, you know how easy it is for one to die . . . something wrong with an artery of the heart or brain, and it's all over. And I am certain that no one else has ever had an adventure like this.

Well, it was the middle of the night, and the Balkan Express was speeding us through mountains and valleys. At about half-past one in the morning I could not sleep, so I went into the corridor to get a breath of fresh air. This, however, soon proved to be boring, as all I could see of the country was black dots. Even a spark of light flashing by seemed an event. Everybody was fast asleep around me. There was not a soul in the corridor.

I had just decided to return to the compartment when the conductor appeared with a lamp in his hand. He was a stubby Bulgarian with a black moustache, and had apparently completed his tour of the train. He had already seen my ticket some time before, but as a sort of greeting he flashed his lamp and came up to me. Obviously, he was as bored as I.

Now, I could not give you a reason why, but a sudden impulse prompted me to enter into a conversation with him—just to have a heart to heart talk, you know what I mean. I asked him in Bulgarian if he smoked. That was my entire knowledge of the language. I had learned it on the train from the advertisements. Except for a half a dozen words, such as "yes" and "no," I give you my word of honour that I knew no more. The conductor lifted his hand to his cap in answer. I opened my cigarette case and offered him a smoke. He took out a gold-tipped cigarette with great

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reverence. I took another with less reverence. He fumbled in his pocket, produced a match, lighted it, and, in a totally strange language he muttered something like "please." Then I offered him my lighter and gave a parrot-like imitation of the word I had just heard from him. Both of us were smoking now, exhaling the fumes through our nostrils. It was quite a promising beginning. To this day I am filled with pride when I think of this scene. With what a knowledge of human nature had I built up, dramatized, directed and produced it! With what a deep knowledge of psychology had I planted that little seed which, as you will hear in a moment, developed into a large wide-spreading tree, under which I rested after the fatigue of a long journey and arose in the morning rich with unusual experiences. You think I overrate my capacities. Perhaps, but first listen to this.

You must admit that my acting technique was sure and perfect from the very first moment. You see, I had to make him believe that I was a born Bulgarian, and that I spoke the language as well as the professor of Bulgarian literature at the University of Sofia. In order to create this impression, my behaviour became a bit *blasé* and careless. First of all, I did not fall into the fatal mistake of being loquacious, though it is true that this was not particularly to my credit. You see, foreigners, except the English, are characterized by the fact that they always try to speak the language of the country in which they are travelling. They are, as a rule, too enthusiastic about it and soon give themselves away. The natives, on the other hand, only nod when spoken to, and usually express themselves in monosyllables. Often one has to almost pull the words out of them, and when they actually speak they are rather slangy, using battered words, shiny and bent from long use. They produce them, sleepily, from the rich, hidden treasures of the language. As a rule they are

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fighting shy of using the correct terms, too self-conscious to care about grammar and idioms. Just imagine what would happen if they had to speak for hours on a dais or to write a book amounting to several thousand words ! They would prove quickly to their audience that they had not the slightest idea of their own language.

So, to go back to the conductor, we were puffing in one of those intimate little silences in which great friendships, real understandings, and long happy marriages are born. Had somebody been invisibly present, he might have said that my expression was both serious and kind. Occasionally I frowned. Then, for a change, I smiled and looked at him attentively. But, after all, it was my place to start the conversation which I felt already had wonderful possibilities. I yawned and sighed. Then I put my hand on his shoulder, lifted my eyebrows so that they formed an enormous question mark, and, tossing my head, I murmured something which I thought might mean the word "well," or something to that effect, in Bulgarian. The conductor seemed to discover in this friendly form of interest a souvenir of his childhood, or the mannerisms of one of his colleagues, who would inquire in this way, "Well, what's the news old man ?" He suddenly smiled and began to speak. He uttered four or five sentences then came to a standstill and waited.

I was also waiting, and had very good reason to. You know it as well as I. I was meditating on what I could answer. After a short hesitation, I came to a decision. I said : "Yes."

Experience has taught me that whenever I am not listening to the conversation at home, or don't understand something, I always say "yes." Therefore I never have any trouble. Even when I actually seemed to have agreed with something I should have condemned by this affirmative monosyllable, I simply had to make them believe that it was like "oh

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yeah," irony rather than agreement. We all know how many times "yes" means "no."

The results proved that my line of thought was sound. The conductor became more informative, then, unfortunately, stopped talking. Now, with an accent expressing the interrogatory form with a tone of misgivings and surprise, I said "yes?" This, so to speak, broke the ice. The conductor melted and went on speaking for a quarter of an hour. His conversation was pleasant, and apparently varied and interesting. This time I could relax as I did not have to think of a possible answer to give him.

That was my first decisive success. As he spoke, as the words and sentences poured out of his mouth like little rivers, as he talked, prattled, babbled, it was evident that now no one could have induced him to believe that I was a stranger. This conviction, though it seemed to be firm, necessitated support and needed to be maintained. For the time being I escaped the very grave problem of answering him, and though I occupied my mouth with a cigarette so as to give a visible sign that my lips were engaged, I could not neglect my amusing entertainer, and from time to time I had to do my best to keep the fire of conversation alive.

How did I do that? Naturally, it was not with words that I achieved this effect. Instead I acted. Like an actor, you might say like a first rate actor, with all parts of my body. My face, my hands, ears, and even my feet moved as they should. I was naturally cautious. I feigned attention, but not that kind of forced, insincere attention which creates suspicion from the first, I imitated that kind which, like a fire, now languishes and disperses itself, then flares up again and breaks into flame. I was careful about other things as well. Occasionally, I made him understand with a gesture that I didn't quite see his point. You would naturally think this

## BABEL

was the easiest of all. You are wrong. That was, my friends, the most difficult of all. Since I honestly and truly did not understand a single word of his whole conversation, I had to be very careful that my expression should not be too sincere or convincing. I was lucky and did not overlook this point. The conductor simply repeated his last sentence and I nodded as if I had said "Oh, now I see what you mean."

Later on, there was no necessity to kindle the gaily crackling fire of his conversation which was flaming like a stake.

The conductor spoke. About what? You are really none too tactful. How should I know? Naturally, I was terribly curious. Maybe he was telling about the regulations of the railway company; perhaps about his family and his children; maybe about growing beetroots. The possibilities were unlimited. God Almighty only knew what he was talking about. From the rhythm of his speech I felt that he was telling a gay, long-winded story which, within broad epical banks, rooled toward its final development. He was not in the least hurry. Nor was I. I let him wander from the point and splash like a rivulet, for I knew he would eventually turn back and flow into the hollow, comfortable river-bed of conversation. He often smiled. The story he was telling me must have been rather spicy, and there were parts which, I presume, were definitely unrepeatable. He winked at me confidentially, as if I had been his accomplice, and laughed. Now and again I laughed with him. Often I pretended not to share his views. After all, I did not want to spoil the man. I only appreciated in moderation that old-world, golden humour, which really came from his heart and flavoured his narrative. It was about three in the morning, and we had—I mean he had—been talking for fully an hour and a half, when the train slowed down as we neared a station. The conductor took his lamp, apologised that he had to jump off,

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but assuring me that he would soon be back to finish the story. I was sure he had not yet reached the climax, which I was anxious to hear. I leant out of the window. I bathed my head in the fresh air. On the ash-grey of the sky there were magenta flowers of the dawn. In front of me was a village smelling of fresh cream, on the platform a few women with kerchiefs on their heads. The conductor spoke to them in the same language as he had spoken to me, but with better results, for they at once understood what he said and made their way towards the third class carriages at the back of the train.

He was with me again in a second, a smile still on his lips, and continued his narrative laughingly. He soon came to the point which he had promised. Then he shot out his laughter. He laughed so much that his whole body was trembling. He was surely a devil of a fellow. He was still laughing when he fumbled in his pocket and pulled out a notebook fastened with an elastic ribbon. This he opened and produced a dirty letter, which, presumably played an important part in the story, and was, perhaps, even its decisive argument. He pressed it into my hands, indicating that I should read it and give him my opinion. You all can imagine what my opinion could have been. I saw only Russian characters written in pencil, almost obliterated by hard wear. Naturally, I took it very seriously and continued to feign an intelligent interest, while he stood aside and studied my facial reactions. "Yes," I mumbled, "Yes, yes," in negative, affirmative and interrogative tones. Meanwhile I kept on shaking my head as if to say "typical," "extraordinary," or "yes, that's life." You can use these movements of your head in every conceivable situation that might arise. There has never been a circumstance when you could not say "that's life." Even if someone dies, as everyone

must do once, we say again, "that's life." I toyed with the letter, even smelt it close to my nose. It had a faint smell of moisture, and since I could do nothing else, I handed it back to him. Besides this, there were several other things in his notebook. He produced a photograph which, to my great astonishment, depicted a dog. I studied it with pursed lips as if I were a devotee of dogs. I soon noted, however, that he did not approve of this. It seemed to me that he was angry with the dog, so my face became grave and I gnashed my teeth at the animal. My astonishment, however, only reached its peak when, from the little side pocket of his notebook, he brought out a little object wrapped in tissue paper and asked me to open it myself. I opened it. All I found were two rather large green buttons such as Bulgarian peasants wear on their coats. I played with them, rattling them together, as if I were a collector of buttons, but the conductor suddenly snatched them from me and, as if he did not want to see them any more, hastily hid them in his note-book. Then he took a few steps, turned around, and leant against the side of the corridor.

I could not understand and jumped towards him. Then I saw something which jolted me. His eyes were full of tears. That big, strong man was weeping. To begin with, he tried manfully to conceal his tears. Then he broke down and wept until his lips were trembling. I began to feel giddy over this deep, unsolvable tangle of life. What could this mean? What could be the connection between these long sentences, the laughing and the weeping? What had one to do with the other? What had the letter to do with the photograph of the dog? What had the photograph of the dog to do with the two green buttons? And what had all of this to do with the conductor? Was this all madness, or the contrary, the humanly, healthy overflow of sentiment? Had the whole

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thing any meaning at all in Bulgarian or any other tongue? I felt near to despair.

Then suddenly I grasped the conductor by the shoulders with full force to give him courage, and shouted into his ear "no, no, no"—in Bulgarian. Almost choked by his tears he stammered out another monosyllabic word which might have meant "*many thanks for your kindness*" but could also be interpreted as "*you won't knock me about next time, you big bully.*" Slowly he came to himself. His panting became less audible. He wiped his wet face with his handkerchief. Then he spoke. But now his voice was totally different. He questioned me sharply. I presume that they meant something like this: "*Why did you say 'no' after you said 'yes'?*" "*Why don't you now agree with what you said before?*" "*Let's finish this turncoat game.*" "*Let's get down to brass tacks. Well, yes or no?*"

The questions were quick and resolute as if he had fired them at me from a machine gun pointed at my breast? You simply could not escape them. It seemed as if I had gotten into a scrape and my good luck had deserted me. It was my superiority which helped me out of it. I pulled myself up, looked at him with an icy, sharp stare, and, as one who regards it to be under his social position to answer such questions, I turned on my heels and, with long steps, returned to my compartment. There I dropped my head on the little cushion I had brought with me and fell asleep as quickly as someone who dies of heart failure. I awoke about noon. It was bright and hot. There was a knock on my window and the conductor came in. He reminded me that I had to get off at the next station. But he did not move. He remained standing by my side, like a faithful dog. He spoke again, fluently, quietly, without interruption. Perhaps he apologized. Perhaps he was accusing me because of the bizarre scene last

## BABEL

night. That I don't know, and can't tell you. But humble contrition and repentance were reflected on his face. My attitude was cool. I let him shut my suit-cases and take them into the corridor, but at the last moment I began to pity him. When he had given my luggage to the porter and I had slowly descended from the train, I threw him a dumb glance which expressed this idea :

*“It was not very nice of you to do what you have done, but it is only human to make a mistake, and this time I will forgive you.”*  
Then I said aloud in Bulgarian, “Yes.”

The word had a magic effect on him. The conductor softened. His face brightened. He regained his former jovial expression. He gave me the salute, standing stiffly alert. Thus he stood in the window, tense with happiness, until the train moved off and he disappeared out of my sight for ever.

## *Snow Caps*

ONE late November afternoon two tramps were walking along a road in the West Highlands. The road, which had been running West across the open moor, was turning South and dipping towards a valley, on the far side of which rose a chain of huge snow-covered mountains. The scene was of an extraordinary magnificence. The late autumn colouring of bracken and heather swept away from a fierce rust-red in the foreground to a softness that in the valley became bloom, and finally, where the first frosty mists began to rise, vague as a light thrown upon smoke. The bases of the mountains were dim and shadowed. The snow caps, shining clear in the afternoon sun, did not seem to belong to them at all, but to hang unsupported in the clear upper air. They seemed much nearer than the mountains.

But the tramps were not interested in the scene. They walked fast, one a little ahead of the other. The man in front, stocky, black bearded, without an overcoat, shuffled along head down, his hands thrust deep into his trouser pockets. The other, who was taller, with a weak, unhappy face and a straggling moustache, was at pains to keep up

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with him. His long tattered overcoat flapped about his knees as he pursued, and he kept up a fitful stream of remonstrance, directed towards the back of his companion's neck.

"Why won't you listen to reason?" he began again. "You don't want the boy. He's no manner of use to you. You don't concern yourself with him."

The other hunched his shoulders, muttered, and quickened his pace.

"You don't want him," persisted the taller man. "It's no use pretending you do." Then, his note becoming even more plaintive, "What's the hurry, Barney? Why can't you stop a bit, and listen to reason?"

Without slackening his pace, the other half turned, and barked over his shoulder.

"I got my natural affections, haven't I? You don't deny that?"

"You don't show 'em much, then. There's not much sign of 'em as I can see."

Barney stopped so abruptly that his pursuer almost canonned into him.

"Oh, I don't, don't I?" he said unpleasantly.

The taller man recoiled a step. Intimidated, he still stuck to his guns.

"No, you don't," he repeated. "At least, I can't say as I've noticed it. Except when I say I want him; that's the only times."

"You want him, eh? And what right in the wide world have you got to want him, Ted Bossom? What do you want him *for*?"

"What do I want him *for*?" repeated the other stupidly. "I don't want him *for* anything. That is to say, nothing particular."

"Then why do you want him at all?" And before Ted

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had time to answer, he turned and began to walk on. "She's put you up to this," he said over his shoulder.

"No, but look here, Barney—"

"She's put you up to it, I say."

"Well," expostulated Ted, "what if she has? She and me wants to settle down. What have you got to say against that? You and her are finished, anyway."

"Are we?" sneered Barney. "You ask her about one evening six weeks ago, then. One Saturday evening, say to her."

Ted swallowed unhappily.

"Well, even so," he said, "I mean as a regular thing. You and she haven't been regular, not for years now."

"You're a nice pattern of a domestic man yourself, aren't you?"

"Well, I go the road, I admit. But I never go far. I stick to this here county. I'm never away for more than three weeks at a time."

"Oh, you're a holy wonder, you are. We all know that. Ted Bossom, the domestic man. The prop of the homestead."

For a minute or so they shuffled on in silence. The sun, catching a bush covered with berries by the side of the road, lit it with so brilliant a colour that even Ted, labouring with his problem, noticed it.

"You might listen to reason, Barney. It's a good offer I'm making you: an honest offer. She's behind me with it, yes, of course, she is, that's only natural. I want to do what I can for her and the boy."

"*My boy—and don't you forget it.*"

"Of course I don't forget it. I shouldn't be offering for him if he wasn't yours, should I?"

Barney stopped.

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"Look here. When we go past a farm house—are you the man the dog barks at, or am I?"

Then, as the unhappy Ted made no answer: "Very well, then," he said: and walked on more resolutely than before.

Looking at the back of the thick neck before him, with its ledge of greasy hair falling over the coat collar, Ted felt hatred blaze up in his soul. Licking his lips, he looked at a large round stone by the roadside. If only he had the courage to pick it up, run after Barney, and bang it on his head! Bang him till he either yelled for mercy and promised to do as he and Meg required, or, better, was silenced for ever. Better, because Barney was not of the kind that keeps a promise. Tricky, dirty Irishman! No heart, no conscience. Oh, it would be good to do him in, to avenge years of insult and hardship in a few smashing, well-aimed blows. But to do a man in was a hanging matter. Besides, it took strength and bravery, and Ted was neither strong nor brave. He thought too much, he saw too much. That's what spoiled him; and he had sense to know it. It was the Barneys of this world, who didn't think or feel or see beyond their noses, that came off best.

Rounding a corner, the two tramps saw a thin column of smoke rising straight into the frosty air, and realised that they were not alone. In a little hollow by the roadside another tramp, a large fellow with a bullet head, a big belly, and a red stubble that could hardly be called a beard, was sitting on the ground beside a fire. Ranged round about him were two or three cooking pots, and between his spraddling knees he had spread a clean white napkin. Evidently his preparations for a meal were complete, for, at the moment he looked up and saw the travellers, he was opening his clasp knife. Over a corner of the fire a kettle hung from a tripod made of freshly-cut green sticks.

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As soon as he beheld Barney and Ted, the red-bearded man threw back his head and bellowed a hospitable greeting.

“Come along, mates,” he cried. “You’re just in time for tea. Come along. I got more than I want here, and once it’s cooked, ‘addick don’t keep.’”

Barney stopped short suspiciously. An invitation so alien from his own nature filled him with distrust. Ted paused irresolute too.

“Come along, mates,” urged the red-bearded man, seeing them hesitate. “Don’t be bashful. There’s plenty for all. Look.”

The appetising smell, borne suddenly towards them on a breath of frosty air, was irresistible. With muttered thanks, they found themselves places by the fire. Barney, however, even while he accepted the generous portion of fish their host cut them, remained aloof, looking over him and his preparations with a cold eye.

“Mind that,” he said, nodding towards the tripod from which hung the kettle. “It’s rickety.”

The red-bearded man gave it a careless glance.

“It’ll do,” he said. “Now then, mates, all set? Fall to, then, and here’s luck to us all. I’ll make the tea presently.

Ah,” he continued, taking a huge mouthful, “that’s a good ‘addick. I knew it was.”

Barney was moved to a faint interest. “Where did you get it?” he asked.

“Aha,” said the other joyously. “That’s telling! Ask me no questions, mate, and I’ll tell you no lies. I got one or two good friends hereabouts, among the women, you understand.” He gave an enormous wink, leaned forward, and prodded Ted in the ribs with his knife. “I may not be much to look at, but I know my way about.” He looked from one to another of them, and then addressed Barney.

## SNOW CAPS

“ And where might you be going, mate ? ” he inquired. Barney grinned sourly.

“ Ask me no questions, and I’ll tell you no lies,” he parodied.

The red-bearded man looked surprised, then, recognising the riposte, threw back his head and guffawed.

“ Tit for tat, eh ? Well, but no offence, mate ; where are both you boys going ? ”

Ted was opening his mouth to reply, when Barney said, “ I might be going to Jamaica, or I might be going to Elgin, but as a matter of fact I’m going to neither.”

“ Well,” said the red-bearded man, “ you’re an oyster of a chap, I must say. A regular oyster. There’s nothing to be got out of you at all.”

A malicious smile broke over Barney’s face. “ Were you ever,” he inquired, “ in the Union at Loughlinstown, in the County Dublin ? ”

The red-bearded man stared.

“ No,” he answered. “ I was not.”

“ It’s well for you,” answered Barney, and applied himself vigorously to his meal. The red-bearded man stared at him, stared at Ted, then slowly shook his head.

“ Beats me,” he said with a smile. “ All the same, mates, where are you bound ? For Fort William ? ”

“ You mind your own business,” said Barney, “ and we’ll mind ours.”

“ ’Struth,” said the red-bearded man, in some indignation. “ You are a cross independent sort of a chap, I must say, to answer a man crooked when you’re sharing his tea.”

“ You asked me to share it, didn’t you ? I never asked you.”

“ Well, you *are* a chap ! You *are* a chap, and no mistake. Why can’t you answer a man fair and reasonable when he asks you a question ? ”

Something, whether the comfort of the meal or Barney's churlishness, released a pent-up spring in Ted.

"Reasonable?" he said bitterly, to the red-bearded man. "It's not much good to talk to *him* of reason. I've been trying to get him to listen to reason the whole bloody afternoon, and you might as well talk to a stone."

The red-bearded man was all interest. He leaned forward.

"You have, have you? What was it, an argument you were having? Or was you making him a proposition of some sort?"

"I was making him a proposition, and an uncommon good proposition at that. All right, Barney, it's all very well for you to pull your face crooked. But it was a good proposition, and one you've no right to."

"No right, haven't I?" Barney sneered. "You'll be saying I've no right to my own boy next. What about the order the magistrate made out, eh? What do you say to that? No right!" And he spat contemptuously into the fire.

The red-bearded man began to nod his head portentously up and down. He rounded his lips as if he were going to whistle.

"Oho," he said. "I see. So that's the size of it, eh?"

"Yes." Ted leaned forward eagerly. "You see, I'm keeping company with the woman now, and she wants to settle down and have a proper undisturbed possession of the boy, and put him to school:" and in a few sentences he acquainted the red-bearded man with the whole story.

"Oho," said the red-bearded man when he had finished. "So that's the pedigree of it, is it? Well now, mates, you couldn't have done a better thing than bring this matter to me. I'm a large-minded man with a great experience of the world; and as you will both allow, in this case I am a disinterested spectator. Now—shall I give you my verdict on

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the case?" He looked expectantly from one to the other.  
"Shall I give you my verdict?"

"To hell with your verdict," replied Barney.

The red-bearded man did not notice him. He fixed his eyes on Ted's, giving him a couple of almost imperceptible nods of encouragement.

"Yes," Ted answered. "I'd be very glad to have your verdict. I'm sure we both would. An outsider's opinion, eh, Barney? Impartial, like."

"Good," said the red-bearded man. "Well, boys, my verdict and considered opinion of the case is that Ted's proposition is reasonable *and* fair *and* generous, and that Barney can do no better than accept it. Now then. What do you say to that?"

Ted looked at Barney. The Irishman's eyes had narrowed, but he gave no sign. A fresh wave of hatred rose in Ted. You could never be sure what Barney was thinking, or what he was going to do.

"It's a very good verdict," Ted faltered. "And a fair one, so it seems to me."

"Good." The red-bearded man turned to Barney. "And what do you say?"

"I say," answered Barney unexpectedly, "you can take your bloody verdict and . . . What's more, if ever I want a ginger-chinned jelly-belly's advice on my private affairs, I'll ask for it."

The red-bearded man's face slowly crimsoned. Carefully he put down his food upon the napkin, laid his knife beside it, and rose to his feet.

"You clear out of here," he said majestically. "I've bore enough of you. I've bore you with the patience of Job himself, while you sat there and ate my meat and answered me crooked. Now you can get out. See?"

Barney sat where he was. His eyes had creased to slits.

"Oh," he said. "I can get out, can I?"

"Yes," said the red-bearded man with emphasis. "You can get out, before I kick you out."

Ted watched the quarrel with mixed feelings. A part of him rejoiced madly to see anyone threaten Barney, a part of him was afraid, for Barney was an ugly customer in a fight, and a part of him reflected miserably on the need to keep on terms with Barney till the bargain Meg so sorely needed was struck.

Still Barney did not move. The red-bearded man advanced and stood over him.

"Get out," he commanded. "Get up and get out." And he made as if to kick Barney.

Then with a sudden movement Barney sprang up and towards his opponent. Quick as lightning, he thrust one foot behind the red-bearded man's and flung himself hard against his body, jabbing wickedly in his belly as he did so. Taken by surprise, the red-bearded man uttered a loud grunt and staggered backwards, tripping over the food and falling with a thud close behind the fire. As he fell, Ted observed with horror that his shoulder grazed one leg of the tripod from which the kettle was hanging. Slowly, delicately, the tripod swung to one side, leaned, and collapsed. For an eternal instant the kettle hung motionless. Then it tilted forwards, and a stream bright as molten silver leaped from its spout full over the face and head of the recumbent figure.

With a movement of terror, Ted turned and looked across to the snowy mountains marking the boundary of a valley that had suddenly become too narrow and too loud. He stared at them, shaking, his hands involuntarily lifted to his face, his mind a blank of horror. Barney was the first of the two to recover his wits. Stooping quickly, he grabbed up

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all the food, huddled it into the napkin, and ran, catching Ted by the arm as he did so.

“Come on,” he muttered. “Out of here, quick.”

With one last glance at the screaming, bellowing figure that rolled and kicked convulsively like a rabbit among the ashes, Ted followed. Barney looked quickly up and down the road. By good fortune, it was empty. Then he started off at a shambling run down the hill, Ted at his heels.

For a while the two doubled along, with no sound but their own labouring breath and the clatter of their boots upon the road. Night was rising from the valley. The sun had gone down; the light was fading, and the shape of objects by the roadside was uncertain till one came close upon them. The highest snow cap opposite was still flushed with faintest rose, but, even as it caught and held Ted’s eye, the flush faded, and the peak took on the infinite cold of those about it.

Suddenly Barney stopped running and fell to a quick, shambling walk.

“It was an accident,” he panted. “I never meant to knock him against the kettle.”

Ted made no reply. He needed all his breath: besides, his mind was beginning to work.

“Silly——” went on Barney, whose face was still yellow from fear. “What did he want to go interfering with me for?” He stopped, coughed, spat, then uttered a brutal snigger. “He won’t be able to identify us, anyway.”

“He may be able to describe us, though,” said Ted.

Barney scowled, and his lower lip worked in and out.

“It was an accident, anyway,” he added. “You can witness that.”

“I *can*,” said Ted with emphasis.

Barney turned and gave him a malevolent glance.

“What do you mean—you *can*? ”

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“What I say,” replied Ted. “I can. If I choose to,” he added, marvelling at his own daring.

“If you choose? Look here, Ted Bossom——”

“There’s no call to get excited,” said Ted. “I’m not going to have you a bullying of me, either. I can give witness that will clear you, and I may, if you make it worth my while.”

Barney stood still. He clenched his fist.

“Blackmail, eh?” he said, and his voice had an ugly edge. “You try and do me dirt, and I’ll——”

“Ssh.” Ted stopped him peremptorily, and pointed.

Looking round, he saw a figure looming in the dusk. They had come within half a mile of the village that straggled on the near slope of the valley.

Without a word, the two tramps began to walk on.

The figure turned out to be a labourer returning from his work. He gave them a civil good night, to which they responded. After they had gone a few yards, Barney turned and looked after him.

“Christ,” he muttered. “If he’s going on up the road . . .”

Before they had time to speculate further, however, the man set their minds at rest. They heard his boots leave the road and take a track across the moorland.

Barney stopped again.

“That’s all right,” he said.

“Yes, but,” said Ted, “it may not be all right for long. It’s only a matter of time till they find him. Look here, Barney, it’s no use you fighting me. We two have got to stick together now. You do what I want, and I’ll stand by you, thick and thin. I swear it.”

“Well—what do you want?”

Ted fumbled in his pocket, his hands shaking in his eagerness.

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"Just sign your name on this here bit of paper, that's all."

"Sign my name? What for?"

"Saying as how you make the boy over to me and his mother, legal and true, and hold no more claim for him."

"I'll see you in hell," began Barney slowly, when more footsteps were heard coming along the road.

"Come on," urged Ted, seeing him hesitate. "Here's a pencil."

"All right," growled Barney. "Let's see the bloody thing." He took it and held it up to catch the last of the light, screwing up his eyes.

"I can't see what it says."

"That's all it says, I promise you. Here, hurry up and sign."

"And you'll stick by me and keep your word?"

"I will. I'd be afraid not to," added Ted, with a sickly grin. Barney hesitated a second more.

"Very well," he growled. "Give me the pencil."

"There. Sign it there, over the stamp."

"What the hell has it got a stamp for?"

"Twouldn't be good and legal if it hadn't a stamp," explained Ted, who once had seen a receipt made out. "Here, steady it against the brim of my hat."

Snatching the hat, Barney affixed his signature.

"There," he growled, handing back pencil, hat, and document. Ted took it with a relief that was almost incredulity.

"That's good," he said, stowing away the precious document and hurrying on. "That's good. Now I'll bear any witness you like, Barney. I'm glad you seen reason. I'm real glad. You acted very reasonable. I hoped you would."

"Shut your trap," hissed Barney, snapping at him like a wild beast.

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He hurried on without a word, and Ted, following, had much ado not to laugh aloud. For a few minutes his exaltation persisted, leaping up in waves. Then it weakened, and he tried desperately to urge the waves on, so that they should cover a memory that was like a sore spot at the back of his mind ; the memory of something horrible left behind by the roadside, a blind, moaning thing, shivering in the cold of night. With all his forces he tried to turn his mind away from it, to think of the joy of Meg and the secure times ahead of him : but he could not. His triumph evaporated like breath on the frozen air, and he grew more and more unhappy as he walked along.

MARCEL AYMÉ

## *The Wolf*<sup>1</sup>

HIDDEN behind the hedge the wolf patiently eyed the approaches to the house. Finally he had the satisfaction of seeing the parents come out by the kitchen. As they were on the sill of the door they gave a last order :

“ Remember not to open the door to anyone, whether they beg you or threaten you. We’ll be back to-night.”

When he saw the parents far off at the last bend of the road the wolf walked round the house limping with one paw ; but all the doors were well shut. In the matter of pigs and cows he had nothing to hope for. These species haven’t enough wit to allow one to persuade them to be eaten. So the wolf stopped before the kitchen, set his fore-paws on the window-ledge, and looked into the house.

Delphine and Marinette were playing knuckle-bones before the stove. Marinette—the littlest who was also the fairest —said to her sister Delphine :

“ When we are only two it isn’t much fun. We can’t play Ring-a-rosies . . . ”

“ True, we can’t play Ring-a-rosies, nor Clap-clap-a-handies.”

“ Nor Hornie, nor Old Roger.”

“ Nor Who’ll be the Bride, nor London Bridge.”

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from the French by Allan Ross Macdougall.

MARCEL AYMÉ

“ And yet what is more fun than playing Ring-a-rosies or London Bridge ? ”

“ Oh, if we were three . . . ”

\* \* \*

As the little girls had their backs to him, the wolf tapped on the pane with his snout to let them know that he was there. Leaving their game they came to the window hand in hand.

“ Good-day,” said the wolf. “ It’s not warm out here. It nips, you know.”

The Fairest began to laugh, because she found the pointed ears and the brush of hair standing up on the head very droll. But Delphine wasn’t taken in. She murmured, holding tightly on to the little one’s hand :

“ It’s the wolf.”

“ The wolf ? ” said Marinette, “ then we’re afraid.”

“ Of course, we’re afraid.”

Trembling, the children hugged each other, mingling their fair hair and their whisperings. The wolf had to admit that he hadn’t ever seen anything so comely since he had been racing up hill and down dale. He was quite touched. But what’s the matter with me, thought he, here I am with my very feet trembling.

Thinking it over he came to the conclusion that he had become good all of a sudden. So good and kind that he could never again eat children.

The wolf leaned his head to the left as one does when one is good ; and with his tenderest voice said :

“ I’m cold, and I have a paw that’s hurting me. But more than that, I’m good. If you’ll open the door I’ll come in and warm myself by the stove and we’ll spend the afternoon together.”

## THE WOLF

The children looked at each other in surprise. They never would have suspected that the wolf could have such a gentle voice. Already reassured, the Fairest made a friendly sign, but Delphine, who did not lose her head so easily, quickly recovered her self-possession.

“ Go away ! ” she said. “ You’re the wolf.”

“ You understand,” added Marinette with a smile, “ it’s not our wish to send you away, but our parents forbade us to open the door whether we were begged or threatened.”

Then the wolf heaved a great sigh and his pointed ears lay down on each side of his head. One could see that he was sad.

“ You know,” he said, “ they tell lots of stories about the wolf ; you musn’t believe all you hear. The truth is I’m not at all nasty-mean.”

He heaved another great sigh that brought tears to Marinette’s eyes.

\*       \*       \*

The children were vexed to know that the wolf was cold and had a sore paw. The Fairest whispered something in her sister’s ear, winking to the wolf to let him know that she was on his side, with him. Delphine stayed pensive, for she never decided anything lightly.

“ He has a kindly air, like that,” said she, “ but I don’t trust him. Remember ‘ The Wolf and the Lamb.’ The lamb, for all that, had done him no harm.”

And as the wolf protested his good intentions she threw in his face :

“ And the lamb ? . . . Yes, the lamb you ate ? ”

The wolf wasn’t put out. “ The lamb I ate ? ” said he. “ Which one ? ”

He said that quite quietly as a very simple thing needing

MARCEL AYMÉ

no explanation, with an air and accent of innocence that sent shivers down the spine.

“What? You have eaten many?” cried Delphine. “Well, that is nice!”

“Naturally I have eaten many. I don’t see what’s wrong in that. You also eat them.”

There was no way of denying that. They had just finished eating a leg of lamb for lunch.

“Come, come,” continued the wolf, “you can see that I’m not nasty-mean. Open the door; we’ll all sit round the stove and I’ll tell you stories. Since I’ve been roving through the woods and running over the plains you can imagine how many I know. . . . Just in telling you what happened to three rabbits at the wood’s edge I’ll make you roar with laughter . . .”

The children discussed this with low voices. The Fairest was of the opinion that the door should be opened to the wolf right away. They couldn’t let him shiver in the cold with a sore paw. . . . But Delphine remained distrustful.

“After all,” said Marinette, “you are not going to keep on reproaching him for the lambs he has eaten. He can’t let himself die of hunger!”

“He can eat potatoes,” retorted Delphine.

Marinette was so pressing, she pleaded the wolf’s cause with so much emotion in her voice and so many tears in her eyes, that her elder sister ended by being touched. Already Delphine was going towards the door. She changed her mind with a burst of laughter; shrugging her shoulders she said to the dismayed Marinette:

“No, just the same, that would be too stupid.”

\* \* \*

Delphine looked the wolf straight in the face.

## THE WOLF

“ Tell me, wolf, I had forgotten Little Red Riding Hood. Let’s talk a spell about Little Red Riding Hood if you don’t mind.”

The wolf hung his head in humility. He didn’t expect that. They could hear him sniffing on the other side of the glass.

“ It’s true,” he confessed, “ I ate her, Little Red Riding Hood. But I can assure you that I’ve already had lots of remorse. If it was to do over again . . . ”

“ Yes, yes, we always say that.”

The wolf beat his breast at the region of his heart. He had a beautiful, grave voice :

“ Word of honour, if I had to do it over again I would much rather die of hunger.”

“ Just the same,” sighed the Fairest, “ you ate Little Red Riding Hood.

“ I’m not denying it,” agreed the wolf, “ I ate her, that’s understood. But that’s a sin of my youth. It’s so long ago, isn’t it? And for every sin forgiveness. . . . And then, if you knew the annoyance I’ve had because of that little girl! You can imagine, the thing was in all the papers, and naturally they made much more out of it than there was in it. For instance, they even went the length of saying that I began by eating the grandmother. Well, that’s not true at all . . . ”

Here the wolf began to chuckle, in spite of himself, and without quite knowing that he was chuckling.

“ Now I ask you, eat a grandmother when there was a nice, fresh, little girl awaiting me for my lunch. I’m not so stupid . . . ”

At the memory of that meal of sweet flesh the wolf could not keep himself from licking his chops, showing as he did so, long pointed teeth not at all reassuring for the two little girls.

MARCEL AYMÉ

“Wolf,” cried Delphine, “you’re a fibber! If you were as sorry as you say, you wouldn’t be licking your chops that way.”

The wolf was very sheepish at having licked them that way at the very memory of a plump little girl who had melted in his mouth. But he felt so good, so loyal, that he didn’t want to doubt himself.

“Forgive me,” he said, “it’s a bad family habit, but it doesn’t mean anything . . .”

“So much the worse for you if you’ve been badly brought up,” remarked Delphine.

“Don’t say that,” sighed the wolf, “I’ve had so many regrets . . .”

“Is it also a family habit to eat little girls? You understand that when you promise not to eat any more little girls it is rather like Marinette promising not to eat any more sweets . . .”

Marinette blushed; and the wolf tried to protest:

“But since I swear to you . . .”

“Let’s say no more about it and be on your way. You can warm yourself running.”

\* \* \*

The wolf became very angry because they would not believe that he was good.

“Just the same it’s a bit thick,” he cried. “They never want to hear the voice of Truth. It’s enough to disgust one at being honest. I claim that one hasn’t the right to discourage good will the way you’re doing. And you can tell yourselves that if I ever eat another child it will be your fault.”

Listening, the children thought, not without much inquietude of the weight of their responsibilities and of the

## THE WOLF

remorse they were maybe beginning. But the wolf's ears danced so pointedly, his eyes shone with such a hard sparkle, and his fangs showed under his turned-back chops, that they remained stock-still with fright.

The wolf understood that he would get nowhere with words of intimidation. He asked forgiveness for his outburst, and tried praying. As he spoke his look became veiled with tenderness, his ears lay down ; and his snout which he pressed against the window pane flattened his face and made it look like the gentle face of a cow. Even his voice had the asthmatic softness of an accordion.

“ You can see that he's not nasty-mean ” said the Fairest.

“ Maybe,” answered Delphine, “ maybe.”

As the voice of the wolf became more supplicating Marinette could not bear it any more and went towards the door. Delphine, frightened, held her back by one of her curls. There were slaps given and slaps returned. The wolf agitated despairingly behind the window, saying he would much rather go away than be the cause of a quarrel between two of the loveliest fair-haired children he had ever seen. And indeed he left the window and went off shaken by great sobs.

What a shame, he thought, I who am so good, so tender. . . . They don't want my friendship. I would have become better still ; I wouldn't have eaten any more lambs ; I would have become a vegetarian . . .

Meanwhile Delphine watched the wolf going off limping on three paws, chilled by the cold and grief. Seized with remorse and pity, she called out of the window :

“ Wolf, don't be afraid. . . . Come quick and warm yourself ! ”

But the Fairest had already opened the door and was running to meet the wolf.

\* \* \*

## MARCEL AYMÉ

“ Dear God,” sighed the wolf, “ how good it is to be seated by the fireside. There is really nothing better than family life. I’ve always thought so.”

His eyes dim with tenderness he looked at the children who stood timidly at a distance. After he had licked his aching paw, exposed his belly and his back to the heat of the stove, he began to tell stories. The children came closer to hear the adventures of the fox, the squirrel, the mole, or the three rabbits from the wood’s edge. Some of them were so funny that the wolf had to tell them over two or three times.

Marinette had already hugged her friend by the neck and amused herself by pulling his pointed ears, and by stroking the fur backwards and forwards. Delphine was longer in getting familiar, and the first time she stuck her little hand playfully in the wolf’s gub she could not help remarking :

“ Oh, what big teeth you have ! ”

The wolf had such an uneasy air that Marinette hid his head in her arms.

Out of nicety the wolf did not want to say anything of the great hunger he had in his belly.

“ How good I can be,” he thought deliciously, “ it’s unbelievable.”

After he had told them lots of stories the children proposed that he should play with them.

“ Play ? ” said the wolf, “ but I don’t know how to play.”

In a moment he had learned to play Hornie or Blindman’s Buff, Ring-a-rosies, London Bridge, and Clap-clap-a-handies. He sang with a nice enough bass voice the verses of Old Roger and Here We Go Gathering Nuts in May. In the kitchen there was a hub-bub of pushing and shoving, and loud laughter, and chairs overturned. There was not the least uneasiness between the three friends who acted as familiarly as though they had always known each other.

## THE WOLF

“Wolf, you’re IT.”

“No, it’s you, you moved! She moved!”

“The wolf wins.”

The wolf had never laughed so much in his life; he almost laughed his jaw out of joint.

“I never would have thought it was so much fun to play,” he said. “What a shame we can’t play like this every day.”

“But, wolf,” replied the children, “you’ll come back. Our parents go off every Thursday afternoon. You can watch their going away and come and tap on the window as you did a while ago.”

To end things they played at Horsie. It was a lovely game. The wolf was the horse and the Fairest sat astride his back while Delphine held his tail and drove him in and out about the furniture. His tongue hanging out, his gub opened to the ears, breathless from the running and from the laughter that puffed out his sides, the wolf sometimes asked leave to breathe.

“I give in!” he said with a broken voice. “Let me laugh! I can’t go on. Oh, let me laugh!”

Then Marinette came off his back, Delphine let go of his tail, and seated on the floor they laughed until they almost choked.

The fun ended towards evening when they had to think of the wolf’s departure. The children wanted to cry, and the Fairest beseeched:

“Wolf, stay with us; we’ll play some more. Our parents won’t say anything, you’ll see.”

“Ah, no!” said the wolf. “Parents are too unreasonable. They would never understand that the wolf could turn good. Parents, I know them.”

“Yes,” approved Delphine, “it were better not to stay on. I’d be afraid that something might happen to you.”

## MARCEL AYMÉ

The friends made a rendezvous for the following Thursday. There were still more promises and great effusions. Finally, when the Fairest had tied a blue ribbon about his neck, the wolf went off over the countryside and disappeared in the wood.

His aching paw still hurt him but thinking of the Thursday to come which would bring him close to the two children, careless of the indignation of the crows sleeping in the top-most branches, he sang :

“ Old Roger’s dead and in his grave ;  
He, hi, laid in his grave . . . ”

\* \* \*

On re-entering the house the parents stood by the sill of the kitchen.

“ We smell something here like the smell of a wolf,” they said.

And the children were simply forced to lie and put on an astonished air, which is what never fails to happen when one receives a wolf behind the backs of one’s parents.

“ How can you smell the smell of a wolf ? ” protested Delphine. “ If a wolf had come into the kitchen we should have been eaten up, both of us.”

“ True,” granted the father, “ I never thought of that. The wolf would have eaten you up.”

But the Fairest, who didn’t know how to tell two connecting lies, was outraged that they should speak of the wolf so perfidiously.

“ It’s not true ! ” said she, stamping her foot. “ The wolf doesn’t eat children ; and it’s not true either that he’s nasty-mean. The proof . . . ”

Happily Delphine gave her a kick in the shin or she would have told everything.

## THE WOLF

Thereupon the parents began a long speech wherein there was question of the wolf's voracity. The mother took the occasion to tell once more the adventure which befell Little Red Riding Hood, but at her first words Marinette stopped her.

"You know, mamma, things didn't happen at all the way you think. The wolf never ate the grandmother. You can imagine that he wasn't going to load his stomach just before lunching off a sweet little girl."

"And besides," added Delphine, "we can't always be holding *that* against the wolf . . ."

"It's an old story . . ."

"A sin of his youth . . ."

"And for every sin forgiveness."

"The wolf is not what he used to be."

"One hasn't the right to discourage good intentions."

The parents could not believe their ears. The father cut short this scandalous pleading by calling his daughters feather-brains. Then he tried to show by well-chosen examples that the wolf would always remain the wolf; that it was senseless to ever hope to see him better; and that if one day he came forth as a good-natured animal he would be still more dangerous.

As he spoke the children thought of the lovely games of Horsie and Clap-clap-a-handies which they had played that afternoon, and of the great joy of the wolf who laughed, gub open, till he was breathless.

"One can see very well," concluded the father, "that you've never had anything to do with a wolf . . ."

Then as the Fairest nudged her sister they burst out laughing right in their father's face. They were sent supperless to bed as punishment for this insolence, but long after they were tucked in they kept on laughing at the naivete of their parents.

MARCEL AYMÉ

The following days, to while away the impatience they had to see their friend, and with an ironical intention that annoyed their mother, the children imagined playing the game of Wolf. The Fairest said with a sing-song voice the usual words :

“ Let us stroll through the wood while the wolf is away. Wolf, are you there ? Do you hear ? What do you now ? ”

And Delphine, hidden under the table, answered : “ I’m putting on my shirt.” Marinette set the question as many times as it was necessary for the wolf to put on, one after the other, all his clothes from his socks to his great sword. Then he jumped out at her and ate her.

All the fun of the game lay in the unexpected, for the wolf didn’t always wait to be fully dressed before leaping out of the wood. It happened that he jumped out at his victim in his shirt sleeves, or with nothing else on but his hat.

The parents did not appreciate the joys of this game. Annoyed at hearing the continual refrain, on the third day they forbade it, giving as a pretext that it deafened them. Of course, the children wished for no other game and the house stayed silent until the day of the rendezvous.

\* \* \*

The wolf passed the whole morning washing his snout, shining his fur, and making the hair about his neck puff out. He was so good-looking that the inhabitants of the wood passed him by without knowing who he was at first.

When he reached the plain two carrion-crows, cawing in the noon-day sun as they almost all do after lunch, asked him why he was so prettified.

“ I’m going to see my friends,” said the wolf proudly.

“ They must be very lovely for you to have spruced yourself up that way.”

## THE WOLF

“ I should say so ! Over the whole plain you won’t find any fairer.”

The carrion-crows were now cawing with admiration, but a gabby, old magpie who had been listening to the conversation, couldn’t keep herself from sneering :

“ Wolf, I don’t know your friends, but I’m sure you’ve chosen them quite plump and very tender . . . or I’ve missed my guess.”

“ Shut up, hussy ! ” cried the wolf, angrily. “ There’s how a reputation is built up for you, on the gabblings of an old magpie. Happily I have my conscience in my favour ! ”

\* \* \*

Arriving at the house the wolf had no need to tap at the window-pane ; the two children were waiting for him by the doorway. They hugged one another longly and still more tenderly than the last time, for a week’s absence had rendered their friendship impatient.

“ Ah, wolf,” said the Fairest, “ the house was sad this week. We spoke of you all the time.”

“ And do you know, wolf, you were right ; our parents refuse to believe that you might be good.”

“ That doesn’t astonish me. If I told you that a while ago an old magpie . . . ”

“ And yet, wolf, we stuck up for you, so much so that our parents sent us off to bed supperless.”

“ And Sunday they forbade us to play Wolf.”

The three friends had so much to say that they sat down by the stove before even thinking of playing. The wolf didn’t know where to begin. The children wanted to know all the things he had done during the week ; if he hadn’t been cold ; if his paw was really healed ; if he had met the fox, the woodcock, the boar . . .

## MARCEL AYME

“Wolf,” said Marinette, “when spring comes you will take us to the woods, far, where there are all sorts of beasts. With you we won’t be afraid.”

“In spring, darlings, you will have nothing to fear. Until then I’ll have preached so well to my forest companions that the most snarling will have become gentle as little girls. For instance, no later than yesterday, I met the fox who had just bled a whole chicken-coop. I told him that things couldn’t go on like that ; that he’d have to change his life. Ah, I certainly gave him a good talking to. And he, who’s generally so clever, do you know what he answered me ? ‘Wolf, I ask nothing better than to follow your example. We’ll speak of this later, and when I have had time to appreciate all your good works I won’t be long in correcting myself.’ That’s what he answered me, foxy as he is.”

“You are so good,” murmured Delphine.

“Oh, yes, I’m good ; there’s nothing to be said contrary-wise. And yet, you see how it is, your parents will never believe it. It’s heartrending when you think of it.”

\* \* \*

To dissipate the melancholy of that reflection, Marinette proposed a game of Horsie. The wolf gave himself up to the game with still more zest than on the Thursday before. The game ended, Delphine asked :

“Wolf, supposing we play Wolf ?”

The game was a new one for him ; the rules were explained to him, and quite naturally he was designated WOLF. While he was hidden under the table the children passed and re-passed before him singing the refrain :

“Let us stroll through the wood while the wolf is away. Wolf, are you there ? Do you hear ? What do you now ?”

The wolf answered, holding his sides, his voice choking with laughter :

## THE WOLF

“I’m putting on my drawers . . .”

Still laughing, he said he was putting on his breeches, then his braces, then his collar, his waistcoat. . . . When he came to pull on his boots, he began to get serious.

“I’m buckling my belt,” said the wolf, and he gave a short laugh. He felt ill at ease, a great distress gripped his throat, his nails scratched the tiled floor.

Before his shining eyes passed and re-passed the legs of the little girls. A quiver passed over his backbone, his chops contracted.

“Wolf, are you there? Do you hear? What do you now?”

“I’m taking my great sword!” said he with a hoarse voice, and already ideas were bubbling in his head. He could no longer see the legs of the little girls—he sniffed them.

“Wolf, are you there? Do you hear? What do you now?”

“I’m leaping to my horse, and I’m leaving the wood!”

Then the wolf, letting out a great roar, jumped out of his hiding place, the gub wide open, the claws out. The children hadn’t even time to take fright before they were devoured.

Happily the wolf did not know how to open doors; he remained a prisoner in the kitchen. On entering, the parents had only to open his belly to release the two children. But, really, that was not in the game.

## *The Born Genius*

HE was clerk to the old vinegar factory—an easy, even a pleasant job. There was not a great deal of work to be done ; the factory was on the outskirts of the city, one might almost say in the country, and Phillips, the manager and owner, was easy to get on with. Besides, Lenihan knew he was not a very satisfactory clerk and not every employer would have put up with him. There were times when Phillips had even been known to roar up from the yard to the office-window.

“ Lenihan, will you stop that blasted singing ? ”

And the sweet, tenor voice, that like a thrush in full music had been trilling up and down the scales with swollen throat for the last half-hour, would fall silent in the middle of a run. Then old Phillips would sniff through his great red beak of a nose, and with a sigh the workmen would take their shovels or their hods again, and up in his office Lenihan would raise his eyebrows and his shoulders as if to bear a sudden weight before he returned to his ledgers.

Even the workmen knew he was not a satisfactory clerk, and they whispered that Tom Phillips must have had something to do with his coming into the world or he wouldn’t have put up with him at all. When they came to the office-

## THE BORN GENIUS

window on Saturday for the week's pay they might find him sweating with excitement and nervousness over a pile of notes and silver, counting the amounts over and over again, forgetting to which envelope each little pile belonged, making wrong calculations, and finally getting so utterly confused that they would have to come to his aid before he got it all correct.

In return he occasionally sang for them. If he passed by as they lay resting after the midday meal, they would grasp his hands and sleeves and legs and beseech him for a song. They did not care what he sang ; anything so long as they heard him. Not that he always agreed. He would explain that a singer must be very careful of his voice, *so* careful. But if he did sing, he would draw himself up, take the key from a tuning fork, puff out his voice in a little cough, face the marsh, the sluggish stream, and the leaning poplars, as if they were an audience, and with as much care as if he were in the greatest theatre in the world, sing for the four or five old workers lying about him, all stained white with magnesia. He would give them *Flow on Thou Silent River*, or *The Gypsy's Warning*, which is, he explained, really a song for a contralto, or their favourite, the tenor's part from *The Moon hath raised Her Lamp Above* out of Benedict's "Lily of Killarney." Gently he would sing :—

Do not trust him, gentle maiden ;  
Gentle maiden, trust him not . . .

while the men swung their heads in time and winked at one another in delight and admiration.

Over in the green grave yonder  
Lies the gypsy's only child . . .  
Soon she perished, now she's sleeping  
In that cold and silent grave

When he finished he would go away at once with a little

## SEÁN O'FAOLÁIN

bow and a military salute, blushing faintly if he overheard their praise as he went.

“ Ah ! God ! ” one would say. “ He have a massive voice.”

“ A marvel ! ” they would reply in unison.

“ But, of course,” the first would lean forward to whisper confidentially, “ of course, you know, he’s a born genius ! ”

Only Flyer, his brother, would remain silent, leaning back very stiffly, like a waxwork image, taking all this praise in a family spirit. Presently he knew, of old experience, they would turn to him for the latest news of Pat’s doings, and then he would tell them—what matter if they had heard it all fifty times before. Meanwhile he listens, his two hands holding his paunch, his two swivel eyes gazing sadly into one another.

“ Well, Flyer ? ” they ask at last. “ What is he up to now ? ”

Before beginning to talk, Flyer would always shake his head mightily by way of emphasis (as if he were trying to shake his eyes straight in his head).

“ Pat,” he whispers very solemnly and oracularly, “ is a marvel ! ”

Then with a sudden roar he leans forward to them : “ He’s after painting two swans,” he bellows dramatically, “ on deh kitchen windas, wan facing wan way and d’other d’other way. And I swear to God,” Flyer continues with the gestures of an orator speaking to thousands, “ I swear to God dis day,”—here he looks both ways to the sky—“ ye’d tink dey’d fly away while ye’d be looking at ’em. And what’s more, he’s after making a sunny-house outside o’ deh winda, and he have geraniums, and lilies, and posies, and nasturtiums and I dunno what else put growin’ dere, so dat so help me God dis day,”—again Flyer implores the sky—“ you’d tink

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deh swans was floating in a garden, and deh garden was floating in through deh winda, and dere was no winda, but you all flowers,"—here he swims through the air with his outflung hands—"and all swans, and all garden, and, and, . . ."

He never finished his account of anything, his head taken by a kind of gigantic Vitus's dance and his eyes starting from his head. He was subnormal, the factory liar. Pat scarcely ever spoke to him, he was ashamed of him for a drunken lout.

Yet the men might well have believed Flyer's tales of his brother's cleverness for they had often said themselves,

"Pat Lenihan could do anything if he only liked."

At the back of the drying shed where the white chunks of magnesia were stacked on shelves to cake was, and had been for years now, the monument he carved for his sister's grave. It was a huge block of grey vermicular stone which the rains of fifty winters would peel and crumble as if it were plaster. For almost a year he had toiled at it, day and night, lying on his stomach on the cold stone, kneeling beside it on the clay, getting into all sorts of postures as he hacked away. For that year he never went to a concert or exercised his voice. He worked so hard that old Phillips, seeing him tapping away at the stone during the spare moments of the lunch-hour used to sniff and say, "If you worked as hard as that for me, Lenihan, by George, you'd nearly be worth your hire." But when it was all ready except the inscription, he had spoiled it. He went at his sister's name in a fury of impatience to be finished, working into the night by candle-light with the bull-frogs croaking below him in the moon-blanchèd marsh. Then he stared in horror at the result. All the S's and N's were upside down—it read like a Russian script. A month later he began at the name again, having carved out a horizontal piece to obliterate what he

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had done. This time, by some accursed fate, although he got all the S's and N's right he forgot everything else. The name read :

### SUSANNANAN LENINAN.

He never completed his task and the monument now lay, as he said bitterly, like a huge letter-box to Heaven for *Susannanan Leninan*—forgotten, unfinished, covered with a sack, behind the drying-sheds.

## II

To-night, leaning against the jamb of his door in Prout Lane, he was idly sketching on the timber of the upright a cabin for his motor-boat. At his feet the runnel tinkled with rain. Suddenly scratching it all out he went indoors. Summer was ended and it would be spring again before he finished that boat in which he would go sea-fishing outside Cork Harbour, explore the inlets of the coast, come late at night chugging up the river to moor under the hanging trees whose aerial roots spread out like great fingers calming the tide. He would sleep in the cabin. The seagulls walking on the cabin-roof would wake him. He would come up to see the mist on the water.

He took up a piece of wood-carving that he had begun last winter and with a small gouge he scraped at the vein in a leaf. He had the house to himself—Flyer was boozing in the pub at the end of the lane and his mother was gone to the chapel to her Confraternity. He laid the piece of wood aside and lit a cigarette and hummed a bar or two from a song—Schubert's Serenade. Then he turned to the grand piano, searched for and found the key, shook out the music, and dusted the worn keys with his silk handkerchief.

\* \* \*

## THE BORN GENIUS

Directly opposite the narrow mouth of Prout Lane, or so it appears to the eye, are the slopes of Montenotte—tonight no more than a crowd of winking lights barely below the flickering stars. From where she had stepped on a mound of ruins somewhere behind Prout Lane, Mrs. John Delaney looked across at those hundred faint lights, of which at least a few were the windows of her home and the lamp at her lodge-gates. She could even distinguish the lay of her own road where the lamps curved in a steady series. But she pulled herself up suddenly—at this rate she would not get her calls finished by midnight. She saw a solitary lamp ahead of her at the end of a passage and made for it; perhaps Ninety-two B was at that end of the Lane, and for the sixth time she smacked her lips in annoyance at not having had the sense to ask for precise directions, or at least, to bring some kind of torch.

But when she reached the lamp its lights fell on the number to her left. Ten B! She was utterly lost. She was about to walk back the way she had come when suddenly from behind the lighted cabin window by her shoulder a piano flung out in great strong drops of sound the prelude to an old familiar arrangement of Schubert's Serenade, and immediately a fine tenor voice opened the duet, though where the contralto or baritone should reply there was silence, except for the gently throbbing of the accompaniment. Her heart beat faster than the time of the music as in one of these half-silences she knocked at that door. The music halted and the door opened. Because the light was strong behind him she could not see Lenihan's face.

"Can you tell me," she said, "where I can find number Ninety-two B?"

At his first word she recognised the voice.

"Yes, of course. But I'm afraid you won't find it your-

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self. Wait one minute," he said diving back into the kitchen. "I'll get my hat and show you."

She lowered her head to step down into the earthen-floored cabin. She saw the grand piano, almost as long as the whole room; it was grey with a layer of dust and coal-ash. A smoke-darkened plastercast of an angel hung over the wide low grate. Pieces of wood shaped like monstrous bones leaned in a corner—ribs of his boat. When he turned she gave him a quiet look, and he, caught by the full shock of surprise, cried out,

"Trixie Flynn!"

"Pat Lenihan!" she reproached. "Why did you never come to see me and welcome me home?"

Her voice was deep, rich, pouting.

"I couldn't, Trixie. I couldn't somehow. What brings you here at this hour of the night?"

"The Saint Vincent de Paul's sent me. Mrs. Cahill in Ninety-two B is sick."

She had recovered completely from her surprise and she arranged her hair as she looked at him from under her eyebrows.

"Sit down," he said.

His voice was shaking and he shut the door and leaned against it.

"The old favourite," she said, looking at the score on the piano.

"I haven't sung for nearly a year and a half."

"Why?"

"I'm making a boat," he murmured, almost as if he were ashamed to have made such an excuse.

"A boat!"

She was shocked.

## THE BORN GENIUS

"Pat Lenihan! A boat! And you with your voice!"

"Ah!" he cried miserably. "It's all very well for you, Trixie. You caught the tide. You've been to Paris and Milan. I read about your concert last March, below in the Opera House."

She grimaced with lips and eyebrows and shrugged her shoulders in disdain.

"*Un rien!* A bagatelle."

"And you're married, too," he whispered.

"Aha!" she trilled. "I often thought we two might get together, Pat. But, *chi le sa?*"

His lips twitched and his eye strayed to a photograph on the piano. She went over to it, and he followed. There she, as a buxom Marguerite, knelt and looked up to Lenihan in the tights and doublet of Faustus.

"And you've been singing in Manchester and Liverpool," he said, looking at her as she looked at the photograph.

"It's my wonderful year," she replied. "Back from Milan. Married. Several recitals. But," she pouted again in a deep, sad voice, "you never came to see *ta petite Marguerite*."

"See what?" asked Lenihan.

"Me!" she pouted.

"Oh! You don't want me now," cried Lenihan.

He slammed down the lid of the piano so that the wires inside vibrated.

"I'll never sing another song!" he declared.

She was about to argue with him but he interrupted her savagely.

"What's the use? Who hears me? And if they did what difference would it make? Who could tell in this hole of a city whether I was good or bad? I suppose if the truth

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were known I wouldn't be taken in the chorus of a travelling Moody-Manners."

"I heard you outside the window," she said. "You were in good voice."

"I'm not. I couldn't be. I haven't practised for eighteen months. It's all a lot of damned tomfoolery. Look at all the hours I've wasted! All the nights! And what good did it do me? I know I have a voice. But it isn't a great voice. I never even got as much as a penny out of it. Not that I want it. Of course the Opera House is a bagatelle to you, as you call it. What are we here but a lot of country boys playing at amateur operatics!"

"Why don't you sing in a choir, Pat?" she asked. "You'd make some money that way."

"A choir!"

His voice was like the sour beer that stank in the vinegar factory.

"A choir! And what would I sing in a choir?"

And through his nose he began to intone horribly.

Tantum ergo . . .  
Sacramentum . . .  
Novo cedat . . .  
Ritui.

"Stop, Pat!"

They were silent for a minute or two.

"I want to sing my old part in that Serenade, Pat," she said gently.

"No."

"Please, Pat!"

"No, no, no!"

She went to the piano, leaving a wave of scent in the air as she swished by him, and began to turn the music with the ample gesture of a prima donna. As she sat and with her white fingers plucked out the modulated sound until the

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music seemed to mingle sweetly with the scent, she saw, looking over her shoulder at him, that he was wavering, and yet waiting in the hope that she would sing alone.

“Have you never been to any concerts, Pat?”

He shook his head. She flung out a few notes like a blackbird full of pride in its song.

“Come on, Pat.” She smiled at him again.

He flung his mood aside and stood by her, his hands clasped tremblingly across his chest, his eyes lost in the dark corner of the room. They began,

Leise Flehen meine Lieder  
Durch die Nacht zu dir,  
In die stillen Hain hernieder  
Liebschen komm zu mir . . .

Her rich, finely-trained voice poured into the room and, out of it through the lanes. Responding to it his body swayed to and fro as he drew up from his chest the most powerful volume of song he could command. Once where she had a bar or two to sing alone he glanced down at her. Her great bosom, too, rose to the notes and it was white and suede-smooth in the lamplight. Looking at it he almost missed a note. He sang with an almost uncontrolled passion the remainder of the song.

When it was finished he fell into a chair by the piano and covered his eyes with his hands.

“My God!” he said. “What a voice! What a godly voice!”

He thought he caught the vibration of triumph and pity in her throat as she said.

“Pat! You really have a very nice voice.”

Outside the window, in spite of the rain, they suddenly heard a chattering group of men, women, and children, all trying to peep through the window-slits and the key-holes. He was glad of the interruption and jerking his head he led

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her to the back-door and across the yard to another lane.

“Come and see me, Pat!” she said. He did not reply. From time to time she said, “Isn’t it wet?” Or, “Mind this hole!” But still he did not reply. At the door of Ninety-two B, she said again,

“Won’t you come to see me? Ah! *S'il vous plaît?* *Mon cher* Pat. *Mon cher petit* Pat.”

“Yes, yes, yes,” he said shortly. “I’ll come. Maybe. Goodnight, Trixie.”

“*Au revoir, mon petit* Pat.”

The light of the cabin windows fell on him at intervals as he went. Then the mist and the dark covered him from her sight.

### III

To her surprise when she heard from him three months later, just before the Christmas Holidays, he was in New York.

It was a picture-postcard of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra with his address and two sentences:

Having a grand time. Richard Trübner has taken me in hand and has great hopes of me.—PAT.

With the cunning of a guttersnipe, she went at once to Prout Lane on two or three entirely superfluous calls, and at each house she said when leaving—“I hear you’ve lost Mr. Lenihan from the lane.” Before she left the slum she had heard more about him than he would ever have written to her in a hundred letters, and as she was driven back to Montenotte she smiled to think how neatly everything she had heard fitted in with all her previous knowledge of Pat Lenihan—his queer silence about himself, his poverty, the strain of bitterness and irreligion in him. He had never told her for example that he lived in Prout Lane, or that he had

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for years supported his mother and sister. And she recalled, suddenly, how when five years before they were meeting frequently for some amateur operetta he had told her of the monument he was going to carve for his sister's grave. She had said, probing inquisitively,

“ And you'll put your father's name on it, too, of course ? ”

“ No ! I will not,” he had snapped back, and flushing walked away.

Well ! here was the secret out at last.

“ Ah, sure, Mrs. Delaney,” they had said to her in Prout Lane. “ That boy could do any mortal thing he liked. D'ye see his house ? 'Twould take the sight of your eyes, Mrs. Delaney. It's massive. Oh, sure, his father will make a Caruso out of him. The two of ye will charm Cork.”

She had to halt their flattery several times. She wanted to hear about Pat Lenihan.

“ His father ? ”

“ 'Nt ye know ? Fifteen years ago ! I'm tellin' a lie, twelve years ago, his fader ran away from his mother to America. He left her with five children, the blackguard. Three of 'em died since. Susie was the last to go. An' all this time the father is sending for the boy. His mother says, an' Flyer says—but you wouldn't mind Flyer—his mother says his father is rotten with money. But the blackguard never sent a penny since the day he left. Oh, Pat's future is cut out for him. Sure he's a genius. He'd charm the married women. And,” with a burst of hypocritical and delightful laughter, “ sure you'd charm the married men ! ”

She envied him. She was to have her first child in the Spring and her singing days, she felt, were nearly done. For all her promise of triumphant nights and applauding audiences half-seen in the gloom across the footlights, she was falling into the routine of a little tawdry provincial city.

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From this on the most she could hope for would be an occasional recital in Cork, with more frequent gratis appearances at charity-concerts to help her husband to get contracts for churches, or convent buildings, or hospitals managed by religions. She did not reply to the postcard. She felt too envious.

### IV

New York was wine to Pat Lenihan, and because it was under snow the silence of it filled into his heart. All he could hear above the perpetual whistling of the chains on the automobiles, and the muffled honk of their horns, was the long, sad squawk of a train-siren cleaving the frozen air, and the low tolling of a bell where an engine drew its load through Manhattan to the north. The air was cold, exhilarating and pure. A few last gentle flakes were added to those frozen on the trees in the Park, and the low sun, like a burning moon, blazed on every glittering twig and branch until they gleamed against the tall, tapering buildings that glittered with their own thousand window-lights through the dark air.

He was driving in a taxi, back from his singing-lesson, to his room in a little down-town theological seminary at the corner of Ninth Avenue and Twenty-first Street. He had often laughed to think what they would say in Cork if they heard he was living in such a place. But two weeks after his arrival in New York his father had procured him a letter to the Dean, and because the seminary was cheaper and less frigid than a hotel he had stayed there ever since. Not that he saw his father ; the introduction was sent to him, and though that was nearly four months ago he was about to meet his father tonight for the first time.

Ever since the tender disappeared into the early-morning mist at Queenstown four months ago, he had been filled by

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the miracle of elation that comes only once in life to every man, that hope which floods into a man when chance at last opens for him his fated and long-desired road. He had never in all his life been so excited as when he stepped off the boat and looked expectantly around the wharf. For had not half his dreams been of the day when his father would return with him, successful and wealthy, to Ireland? But he saw nobody and nobody came to meet him. He was planning to go to his father's business address, the only one he knew, when at the custom's desk they handed him a letter in which his father explained that he had been called away suddenly to Cleveland on business ; they would meet one another in a few week's time.

"There is, to be sure," his father wrote, "a good deal of money in singing, and my Pat must have the best teachers money can buy. Meanwhile you must have a good time."

The letter mentioned several theatres ; one called Duke Edward's Vanities was a "real bully show." Lenihan smiled at the Americanese, and because he could not meet his father went that evening to see something that his father had liked. He came out, unhappy and troubled, his eyes and mind filled with gaudy images of red and purple curtains, sham marble pillars, naked women. Had he not come by chance on a symphony concert and snatched an hour filled with the thunder and whisper of a Beethoven concerto (it was "The Emperor"), he would have had nothing but an unpleasant memory for his first night in New York, a memory that might have shattered his miracle for ever.

After that he lived his own life and the elation of hope blossomed once more. After another three weeks his father wrote again. He was now in Chicago and in a few weeks they would meet. Meanwhile Pat must begin to study, "for my Pat must make a name for himself and I'll help my boy

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to it while I have a dollar left." Things went on like that for another three months, some of the letters containing large cheques, and still Lenihan had not met his father. By now, too, his mother was writing long letters from Cork, charging him in an agony of fear with hiding something from her, and Lenihan spent a good part of his leisure writing long letters to both of them. But his master was by now much more hopeful, and even enthusiastic, and Lenihan could already see, a year away, perhaps, the night of his debut—the little concert-hall, for it would be a very modest beginning, the accompanist looking to him for the signal, the scattered audience of connoisseurs and critics, and then the notices the following morning in the press giving him his first taste of real fame.

It was characteristic of his elation that he found even Ninth Avenue beautiful. And yet, at any rate, around Twenty-first Street, it was merely a dirty, paper-strewn cobbled street, darkened and made raucous by an overhead railway. There was the usual Greek fruit-store, the usual wide-windowed restaurant and lunch-counter, white-tiled like a public lavatory, each with such names as *Charlie's Lunch* or *The Coffee Pot* in gilt across the window; there was an old-clothes shop, a cheap Sicilian haberdasher strayed up from MacDougall Street, a palmist and phrenologist with big-breasted gypsies offering themselves in the doorway, and always the tramcars racing along the avenue under the thunder of the overhead railway. Only when the snow covered the dirt and the smells, and dulled the noise was the place really tolerable. Yet, to Lenihan, it had the charm of a foreign city, the one place that remained indelible in all its details on his memory when he returned to Ireland, a filthy avenue banked in snow, made doubly white by the black girders of the Overhead, and side by side for all its

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length all those vital struggling immigrants' homes. That long noisy street remained with him as a poignantly lovely memory, as a chill, denuded picture like a rocky place at night, filling him with a sense of something more real and brutal than he could ever explain. And it was all the more poignant and bitter when he discovered that for all the four months he was in New York his father had watched for him from the windows of his house over one of those restaurants, coming out of the archway of the seminary in the morning, and going in late at night, getting no more in return for his patient vigil than the briefest glance at his son's face raised questioningly to the sky, or, after dark, the outline of his son's back vanishing under the lamplight.

In the hall, now, by the telephone booth, he stood waiting, and though it was twelve years since they had met, and the old man had grown scant-haired and yellow-skinned and hard-mouthed, they recognised each other at once. Looking at one another, they could say nothing but, "How are you, my son?" and "How are you, father?"—looking shyly at each other, smiling and saying nothing because they had nothing in common they dared talk about.

"Let's go and have a cup of cawfee," said the father at last and he took his son by the arm and led him across to the white counter of Charlie's Lunch.

In the bright light of the restaurant Lenihan noticed that his father's hands were trembling, and that they were rough with work, and that his suit was odorous of the steam-press and the valeteria.

"You've come from Detroit, father?"

"What?" said the father, taken by surprise.

"You wrote me from Detroit, last time, father," said Lenihan.

"Yeah."

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As the white-hatted curate brought them the coffee the father spoke about Detroit to his son, inventing the names of the streets and the squares and the parks.

“ ‘Nt you like New Yawrk, son ? ” he asked then, and in spite of the succession of nasals his intonation was pure Cork.

“ I do, indeed,” said Lenihan.

The old man began at once in a very fast voice to make his confession to his son, but he went round and round it and he could not approach the actual point. He talked instead in a confused way about America and its customs, about democracy and the liberties of America, about freedom of thought and tolerance and cosmopolitanism, and though Lenihan tried very hard to follow him he could not, and finally he gave it up and, barely listening, merely said “ Yes,” or “ No,” or “ Indeed ? ” or “ Do you say so ? ” He was trying to think how he could get to the point of suggesting to his father that he ought to return to his home and wife in Cork. But suddenly he observed how excited and nervous the old man was, and how his eyes were shifting here and there as his talk grew slower and more deliberate. He felt his father was coming to the point and he waited for his opportunity, almost trembling himself with hope and expectation.

“ Of course,” his father was saying, “ you are a young maan still, Pat. A very young maan. And in Ireland a maan has little chance of meeting with experience. But you are a clever young maan and I hope you have understanding.”

“ I hope so, sir,” said Lenihan.

The old man looked at him from eye to eye, and said solemnly and deliberately.

“ A maan’s married life is sacred to him.”

“ Father,” said Lenihan grasping his father’s hand ; how rough it was and how it shook as he held it !

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“Yes, Pat?”

“Father, come home to my mother.”

With a shock he realised that he had often, and often said those words to his father when he used to meet him as a child, wandering drunk in the streets. His father looked at him. There was silence for a moment and then an overhead train thundered by.

“Pat!” said his father.

“Yes.”

“Pat, I want you to stay here.”

“But you can go home without me,” he was beginning to argue when the old man interrupted him.

“Pat, boy, I’ll make a success of you. I’m fond of you and always was. Aren’t you my first son and why shouldn’t I? I have a father’s love for you, Pat. My boy! I’ve done a lot of rotten things, Pat, but you don’t hold them against me? You wouldn’t hold things out against me, Pat, would you? Pat?”

A group of men came in and sat at the counter near them.

“Come upstairs, Pat,” said the father taking his hand.

“Upstairs?” said Lenihan.

“Yeah,” said the father, leading him through the shop. “I know the man here,” he explained. He was like a hare doubling before the dog. He lied at every hand’s turn. Upstairs in the room over the shop the first thing Lenihan saw was a panorama of Queenstown and in surprise, he turned to his father.

“Yes, Pat?” faltered the old man.

“Queenstown!” said Lenihan in delight.

“Aye,” smiled his father, still unable to confess.

“How did it get here?”

“Yes, Pat.”

And he laughed with foolish delight, in spite of his nervous-

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ness, because at last someone else besides himself was enjoying the old familiar scene.

“Look at the old Deepwater Quay !” said Lenihan.  
“And look at Spike ! And Haulbowline !”

Then he stopped.

“Is Charlie an Irishman ?” he said.

He stopped again, his eyes wandering to the fireplace, over which hung an Irish flag, the green with the yellow harp, and crossing it an Italian flag, the quartered shield in the white centre. Beneath it on the mantelpiece was a photograph. He went towards it. It was himself and Trixie Flynn as Faust and Marguerite. When he wheeled on his father the old man was looking up at him like a schoolboy waiting for punishment. But before the confession could come the door was flung open and in raced two lovely little black-lashed boys, and after them a dark-eyed, big-chested Italian woman.

“Whoo ! Pop !” cried the children, leaping up joyously at old Lenihan. “We been shoppin’.”

And they began to show him their New Year toys until seeing the stranger they fell suddenly quiet.

“Anita !” said old Lenihan. “This is Pat.”

It was plain that he had told her at least some of the truth —how much Lenihan never knew ; probably that he was a widower and this was his son. Afterwards it tore Lenihan’s heart to think the old man had not been able to keep it secret from her that he had a son whom he loved. But now as the woman looked at him, searching his face for the face of the other woman to whom her husband had give his earliest love, Lenihan began to think of Prout Lane, wrapped in its veils of mist, and of his mother hurrying to the chapel to her confraternity at night, and he let his eyes fall before hers, and taking his hat he went slowly out of the room.

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His father raced after him down the stairs to stop him, persuading and entreating him, step by step, as he insisted on descending to the street.

That night, when he had at last got rid of his father, Lenihan packed his bag and took the Shore Line midnight to Boston, his taxi racing with whistling chains through the snow-covered avenues, past the great lighted towers of the city's buildings closed for the night, past the theatres he had begun to know so well, dark now and silent and odorous and empty, the shops at rest, the side-walks deserted, into the great station where the foyer was full of light and life, and the waiting line of Pullmans beyond, silent and dark, ready for sleep and a long journey, under the sad whistle of the siren and the low tolling of the bell.

He stayed in Boston for the better part of a year, abandoning all his ambitions and hopes. But there was no looking out of the office window here, no singing at the lunch-hour for the workmen, no intervals in which he might, at his ease, exercise his voice. So, having saved his fare and a little more, he returned to Ireland for Christmas.

Not until he was seated in the train from Queenstown to Cork did it occur to him that in those four months in New York his father must have spent on him the best part of his life's savings, that his father was a poor man, that his father probably was quite fond of him. A light snow, rare event in Ireland, was blowing past the carriage windows, and in it he saw Ninth Avenue and the black girders of the Overhead and, for the first time, his father's face at the window of Charlie's Lunch, peering out anxiously to see him leave the seminary in the morning, peering out at night in the hope of seeing him return, and doing that day after day, week after week, afraid to meet his son, and yet aching to see him, to talk with him, maybe to persuade him to stay with him for

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the rest of his life. The old fellow, thought Lenihan, must have gone to a great deal of trouble and humiliation persuading the Dean to allow me to stay at that seminary; and then he thought of all the devices, all the lies, all the subterfuges his father had employed, and all to no greater result than five minutes painful argument with his son as they stepped down the stairs of the restaurant-cum-haberdasher's shop in Ninth Avenue, and afterwards, the still more painful hours, because so bitter and so insulting, pleading and quarrelling in the little room of the theological seminary over the way. Through the whirling snow-flakes, curling about the bare beech-boughs, and melting on the dark drooping laurels and the tattered hedges he saw only, and now with a sudden but tardy pity, that his father's sin had borne bitter fruit.

The train just then rolled into the city, over the iron bridge into the railway station, and as he stepped from it and saw his mother coming forward in search of him through the crowd, full of joy at the thought that she was about to see her son again (the sorrow of her husband's early desertion long since forgotten), Lenihan realised that he was divided in pity between these two, and that, for being divided, he could never as long as he lived be at ease again with either.

In a covered car, as they drove into the city and up the hills to Prout Lane, Lenihan told his mother the truth about her husband. But when she began to weep for herself and curse her husband with sudden blasphemy, Lenihan found that he had no longer any resentment left in him. And after that, when the news spread through the lane, he refused to talk of it with anybody, and if they insisted on upbraiding his father he would merely say, "Little good it did him anyway," or "He didn't improve himself," or even "Ach ! I pity him sometimes."

All that day a stream of Lane-people kept trickling in to welcome the genius home. They had expected a night of jollification, but they were just as pleased with the drama of the weeping mother, Flyer drunken and fractious on the Guinness intended for the feast, Pat sitting glum and silent by the fire. His piano he had sold before he went to America, never thinking to need it again ; his flowers were long since reduced to withered stumps ; the fire had taken his wood-carvings one by one, as well as the unfinished portions of his boat that used to lean in the corners of the kitchen.

“ Didn’t I have a clean kitchen for you, Pat ? ” his mother wailed. “ And what news have you brought me ! Look at the lovely marbled wall-paper we got you, four-pence a dozen ! And Flyer to put it up for you with his own two hands. Oh ! What a home-coming ! ” she wailed at him twenty times an hour and at each new comforting gossip, until at last her son drove out of the house and down to the river’s edge to look at the skeleton of his boat, and to look in the dusk at the marshes of the vinegar factory. Then the only shelter from the night and his loneliness was the dark lights of Montenotte and Trixie Flynn.

Yet it was no pleasure to him to visit her. Earlier in the afternoon he had observed from an old poster that they were now calling her “ *Madame Delaney, Cork’s Own Nightingale*, ” and as he read it he had groaned aloud, like a man in pain. The rat-eaten place, he had thought bitterly as he walked through its tawdry front streets whose finery was only the thickness of a brick, and through its back streets that looked as if they had been rusting for centuries,—it still had all the mannerisms and unconscious humour ascribed to it by the sniggering Lovers and Prouts and Thackerays a hundred years ago. With a kind of sour joy he began now to roam

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about the city, trying to keep from visiting Montenotte—O Romantic Mount of Night!—associating his own misery with the shades of the Spensers and the Warbecks and the Walters, the Dukes and Earls and Lords Lieutenant and Secretaries whose petty glories were the only ones the place had ever seen. Everywhere he went he sought with deliberate malice for the signs of decayed grandeur—streets of Georgian houses full of cheap shops, a puny bridge called after Wellington, a wide street dubbed a Square and given to Nelson, a horse-trough presented to a Berwick, a slum street to the whole House of Hanover, and every sooty mud-deep quay partitioned off to a Grenville or a Camden, to a Lancaster, to a George, a Charlotte, an Albert. Every exiled down-at-heel sighing for St. James' and Pall Mall, with their flea-bitten servants and their tarnished finery, he snarled, had been offered the immortality of their names on the walls of a jakes in this city of exile. But all the time, as if in spite of himself, he approached nearer and nearer to Montenotte. The bored souls of provincial towns are all like that—feeding on one another without pleasure, like leeches. Finally he was at her door and she met him. He was afraid that she would ask him too many questions about his father and his own plans—as if he had any—but she seemed far more interested in showing him her baby and in telling him about the contract for the new cathedral that all the architects in Cork were trying to wheedle out of the Bishop. Then her husband came in time for dinner, and with him her sister-in-law and her brother, and they prevailed on Lenihan to stay. It was a good dinner, but noisy with cross-talk, and Delaney bored them with talk about the cathedral, the people who were after the contract and the distant relations of the Bishop that were being approached by this person and that, and the best sites for the cathedral,

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the soil and the stone and the style, explaining the advantages of Romanesque by carving arches with his knife in a loaf of bread, and deriding Pugin because he had filled Ireland with plaster Gothic.

“ My God ! I’d rather concrete,” he would declare. “ Though concrete wasn’t as popular once as it is now. That’s what your Americans (to Lenihan) did for us. I remember a competition twelve years ago and I was the first student to suggest a concrete church. How in the name of God ? said the adjudicator—it was Sir Edward Luytens, how in the name of Almighty God, says he, could that roof stand ? Oh, it’s concrete, Sir Edward, says I. Indeed, says Sir Edward, and I suppose the spire is made of cast-iron ! But, you know,” Delaney went on, in spite of the laughter, “ you could have a concrete roof in a Romanesque church. And it wouldn’t be a smaller church. You’d make in the height what you’d lose in the width. And you could have galleries, too.”

And so on and on, while Lenihan kept thinking, “ I’m back in garrulous, windbag Cork.” And his mind filled with images of New York and Boston and he ceased to hear Delaney’s talk except as the babble of an unheeded stream.

After the dinner, whiskey and coffee were handed round and there was much sniggering in a corner over a *risqué* French pictorial. But Lenihan put such a good face on things that he managed to lift out of his mood into a good humour, and while the rain, blown up from the harbour, lashed the streaming panes and the fire crackled with drops falling in the chimney, he and Trixie sang a comical duet from the *Yeoman of the Guard*, and Delaney, who was something of a toper, pranced around the room holding his glass to the ceiling and coming in on the refrain very flat and out of tune. Then he went off to drive his guests home and Lenihan and

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Trixie were left alone, talking over the fire, in a darkened room, of the great singers they had heard, she of Melba, and Patti and Tonnalerre, and Clara Butt, he of Kennerly Rumford and Caruso and his master Trübner. She began to complain sadly of her life in Cork, and he said he could well believe her.

"I have my child, of course," she said. "And I'd die for her. I'd lay down the last drop of my blood for that child," she declared with flashing eyes, and her bosom panted and her voice rose.

The wine was going to both their heads, and Lenihan found himself telling her that her sentiments did her great honour. "But then there's my husband," she said, and her voice fell. "There's John gone off to the club now, and he won't be back until morning." She allowed Lenihan to pat her hand, for he felt he had never liked her so much as tonight, and as she leaned forward and encouraged him to speak he told her readily all about his father. As he left they halted in the door to hum a bar from the Serenade, and he kissed her hand in goodbye.

But as he tramped in a midnight downpour back up to the little sleeping cabins of Prout Lane he felt that he had no right to betray the old man's shame, and, late as it was, he wrote and posted a letter to Trixie warning her that she had his confidence and imploring her to tell nobody what she had heard. She wrote a long and warm letter in reply, saying that she was honoured by his confidence and would respect it. She wrote:

"Don't I understand, Pat, only too well, that such things are best kept quiet in a city like this? There are always people trying to dig out your past in Cork. As for your father, have nothing to do with the old devil. You never know what he'd try to make out of this. Leave him severely

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alone, neither writing to him nor communicating with him in any way. . . .”

Again Lenihan saw his father peering out of Charlie’s Lunch for that morning and evening glimpse of his son and thinking of it decided he would never again visit this coarse woman, wandering instead at night, in and out of the back streets, searching always for old names and old memories, sometimes for snatches of accidental beauty where the shadows of a lamp in an archway made a design of lights that were more like shadows, or where a blank gable-end towered over a lane, or a whitewashed cottage shone like snow under its roof. What was he but another like those Sydneys and Coburgs and Adelaides and the rest of them, whoever they were—another exile tortured by the empty days and the companionless nights?

But in the end he went to her. After all they were the only two people in Cork who really knew what singing meant. And when he did go, late one evening, she was so glad to see him, so childishly glad and so unhappy about her husband, that he felt he had been harsh and unkind and readily agreed to sing with her at a forthcoming concert. But it happened that just that night a priest called to bless the house (“Father Shanahan,” she whispered to Lenihan as he came in, “the Bishop’s Secretary”; and as he went upstairs to pray over the house, “God forgive me, I have my house blessed by half the priests in Cork”). He was a pale-haired, saturnine man, with a voice as high-pitched as a girl’s, and his eyes were soft with innocence or humility. Immediately he entered the room Trixie began to be charming to him and flirt with him in a loud voice and with much winking. His answers, however, were so awkward that Lenihan, to whom Trixie’s talk seemed improper and gross, pretended to be playing with the baby, leaning over the

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pram, glaring down at it as if he were about to choke it. Presently he found himself being intrigued into giving a half-promise to sing the *Adeste* with Trixie at the parish-choir next Sunday, though it angered him to see his half-promise passed on at once as if it were a personal gift of Trixie's to the parish. But she was so charming about it that the little priest grew more and more awkward and finally took his leave, and Lenihan, in spite of his dislike for priests, went with him. Yet the following night he was back at her house again, and again she was delighted to see him, and after that he took to visiting her regularly. There was no other house open to him in Cork.

### VI

But in April he was taken back in the vinegar factory, and little by little the marshes under the office-window began to sprout in green patches, and at lunch-hour he could walk abroad in the fields more and more often under dry skies and broken clouds and work long at his boat and be no longer resentful of Cork. The loveliness of the country encroaching on and compensating for the tawdry town, the promise of long Sundays in summer among the inlets within and without the harbour, where the hills dipped down to the blue sea, and the white line of waves seemed never to move—all this weaned him gradually back to his old self, and the memory of the long heavy nights of winter passed from him.

He was in that happy mood one Sunday as he went to sing at a charity matinee with Trixie. She was waiting for him in the corridor and at once she called him aside to her dressing-room. In the artificial light her hair shone like coils of bronze wire piled on her head, and her rich bosom displayed generously in her low-cut evening gown of pink and silver looked as if a touch would reveal that it had a nap

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on it like a peach. He took her by her bare, braceleted arm.

“Is it the contract for the cathedral?” he asked eagerly.

“No.”

She was awkward. He felt there was something wrong.

“Pat! They are beginning to talk about us. You mushn’t come so often.”

The music of the orchestra rolled up to them as the stage-door was opened and shut.

“Who is talking about us?” he asked, flushing with shame.

“Well! Father Shanahan is dropping hints.”

“Oh!”

“My husband says it’s unwise.”

“It’s the contract you’re thinking of, Trixie.”

“I’m not, Pat. But you know Cork.”

With a sudden impulse of defiance of the mean, tattling city he put his arm around her and kissed her, and she did not resist him, returning his kiss even more warmly than he gave it. It seemed natural to her to kiss him, to hold him in her great maternal arms. A knock on the door called them to their duet and they went down the corridor to the stage, whispering to each other to be calm, to be calm. But as on that first night when she came to his house in Prout Lane, they sang the duet in a rivalry of almost wild passion, accelerating the tempo of the melancholy Serenade until the accompanist found himself never nearer than a quarter of a bar behind. The audience sensed their emotion in Lenihan’s flushed cheeks, and in the woman by her high-flung chin and flashing eyes, and sharing in that emotion, several seconds before their song ended, they sent their clamorous, thundering applause up from the gloom beyond the bright encircling footlights. In the wings Delaney, trembling for his contract,

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waited for his wife ; he implored her to be careful ; the Bishop was in the house and Shanahan was somewhere on the stage. But beyond the billowing curtain the applause rose and fell in waves until they came forward to sing again, choosing with an almost incredible lack of discretion the love-duet from *The Lily of Killarney*. By the prompter's box Father Shanahan looked on with tightened lips and disapproving eyes as Lenihan rose breathlessly to,

I come, I come, my heart's delight !  
My heart's delight,  
My heart's delight,

sung so feelingly that when it was over and he reached the side of the stage he collapsed in a chair. They brought him a glass of water and as he sipped it mechanically he saw Delaney come in from the auditorium, in a fury, to lead his wife to her room, and as they went little Father Shanahan looked after them with a cold stern look in his innocent eyes.

After that painful scene he did not visit her again, and indeed, she wrote to warn him not to come to her. Fortunately it was summer and he could now work for long hours in the evenings at his boat. As he saw it, as it were, come to life under his hands he became filled with that supreme happiness and calm which is known only to the student, the creative man, and the woman with child. July came and the trestles under his boat were deep in buttercups, and as he worked the salmon leaped up the falls, bow-bent silver. During those days he seemed to be tireless, and when the darkness drove him home to his cabin-kitchen he worked late into the night making cabinets to exchange with a firm of furnishers for the timber and brass, the iron and glass fittings he needed. It was August and a woodbine trailed its tendrils from the hedges over the flank of his boat. As with his sister's tombstone he worked in a fever of impatience to

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be finished. September came and under his boat the fox-glove rose pale and tall, and the wild-arum glowed within its tight wrapping. October followed and the denuded trees showed the red berry of the dog-rose, warming all the summer long as at the sun, burning now like the holly-berry on its branch. But before the month died he had painted the name on her prow—*The Trickster*; and dared write to Delaney asking if he and his wife would come to launch his boat.

That Sunday, after singing in the choir, she came, and the boat was lowered down the slip and it breasted the water and floated there in broken ripples of colour. Lenihan rushed forward to thank her but her husband was impatient to be gone and she would not delay. All he could say was,

“Thanks. Is he still angry?”

“Yes. He says you lost him that contract.”

“Didn’t you get it after all?” he cried.

“No,” she said. “We heard last night that . . .”

But Delaney sounded his horn impatiently and she turned to go.

For a week Lenihan was delighted with his boat. Then the engineers from whom he had ordered the engine told him it would never be of any use to him. He argued with them for hours, but they only shrugged their shoulders at him. “The timbers, Mr. Lenihan, are too far apart and flimsy to bed the engine on them.” “Yes, but. . . .” “The stern-post would not bear piercing for the propeller shaft.” “I could . . .” “The sheer of the quarter makes it impossible to lead the shaft through at the proper angle.” He gave it up, and as in the case of his sister’s tombstone he never went near it again. It lay moored under the alders until marauding boys knocked a hole in it, and sinking half-ways to the shallow mud, with the passage of years and the winter floods it grew slimy and green and hulk-like.

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The evening Lenihan discovered that it would never take him out to the misty sea, never nuzzle the sea-anemones, never touch the swaying ocean-flowers that glisten in the carmied inlets of the harbour, it was grey with the first cold rains of November. He stood by his door in Prout Lane, biting his nails, and staring across the dark valley of the Lee at the hanging lights of Montenotte, while the slowly-waving mist veiled the moon, a warm haze from the sea, persistent as a fog. Winter had begun again, and again the boredom of the empty days and the long companionless nights. The house was so silent that he could hear the people talking beyond the dividing wall.

Searching for the key of his piano—a cheap second-hand upright affair—he wiped the dust from the yellow keys and sat to play—the Schubert Serenade. As the worn keys plucked out the thin drops of sound his voice rose gently to the words. Suddenly he stopped and listened. He rushed to the door and flung it wide. All he saw was the mist curling about the gas-lamp overhead and the lighted cabin-window vanishing down the winding lane. He closed the door and returned to his song. Its gentle beauty, so sad, so tender, soothed him even as a mother soothes a child. He could hear that the voices in the next house had fallen silent and noting it he blushed. His fingers drew the notes in slow procession,

Lass auch dir die Brust bewegen,  
Liebschen hore mich;  
Bebend harr' ich dir entgegen,  
Komm, beglücke mich,  
Komm, beglücke mich, beglücke mich . . .

The tears gathered in his eyes. He almost feared to finish so lovely a song.

# *Friends of old Henry*

“A<sub>H</sub>,” said the old man they called Arthur, sadly, “it’s that bad-tempered Irish wife of his son’s that’s the cause of all the trouble ! ” He said it with conviction, though tremblingly—he was nearer eighty than seventy—and this conviction of his was not lessened, nor expressed with less freshness, now that he had said it, and to the same audience, at least a score of times.

“I say he’s a fool,” said Snorty violently. “I’d never let no woman use me like that, not even if she was me own, I wouldn’t, let alone a son’s ! I never ’ave, an’ I’ve lived with one an’ another of ’em in me time, if you’ll believe me ! ”

They had heard him say so before, the rest of those old men, so they made no comment. They did believe him—there was no reason why they shouldn’t, except that his candid blue eyes looked ridiculously moral. He lived now in the house of some people to whom they knew he paid no money. Indeed, he was himself fond of asserting it. From his jeering manner and his winks and his repeated announcement that it would mean more than their house was worth for them to bully him, they had come to the conclusion that a long life spent in blackmail and living on others—of some of the earlier cases he had given specific instances—was

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petering out with full attention to the same activity. He knew something the old couple had done, and he'd split if they didn't keep him, that was all. Snorty never seemed to have a copper, or to give him credit, to want one. But he had to live—there had to be food and a shelter, and he'd always seen that he got them. Nobody seemed to know his real name. . The sobriquet of "Snorty" merely recognised that distressing habit of his of making horrible noises with his mouth and throat.

"I don't know whether he's a fool," said a quiet voice that wanted some catching. "I expect he's afraid of her really. Where else is he to go?"

This was from Mr. Murray. They all called him Mister because they believed he had in the dim past been a bank manager who had gone wrong and spent a few years in chokey. Though he had never said as much. Because of his education, and his ability not only to read, but to weigh up the news in the papers, these old men would refer all manner of disputes to him.

They had made those two public seats their club. They were on a convenient little recess of waste ground facing the main road of the town, and there wasn't much of its life that they missed. They were a faithful crew, and were usually at Headquarters, though there were of course days when, owing to bad weather or the failures of the flesh, their numbers were few.

"I did hear," said Bob Bland, who was rather specially friendly with Old Henry, "he gives all that sixteen shillings a week he gets in pension and club money to his son. Fine sort o' son! Him and that bitch of a woman give him back just enough to get his meals out midday 'n' tea-time. Just think of it—they won't get the poor old feller a cup o' tea! Out all sorts o' weather he is, walkin' about or gettin' a meal.

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He'd rather go in the Union at Richester there, but it costs seven bob a week, and his son won't let him. Keeps 'is money y' see? And him eighty-three last birthday. That's crool 'ard, that is!"

They sat thinking of this, but they made no comment. Life was hard—it was hard for all of them, but they were well content now with their unchanging lives, so long as they had not to counter open hostility. They reckoned they were a bit too old for that. Most of all possible changes and chances, just except that final one of all, must have happened to one or other of them, and life, they knew, held nothing more up her sleeves. They might speculate on the tricks that Death could play. They probably did, but they did not much care to talk about them.

Bob Bland would have known the rent of any place in the town, of course, or in Richester either as like as not, apart from the Workhouse, seeing that he'd once owned blocks of property in both places that brought him in several hundreds a year. Got it all gradual, too, from deals in which his cunning saw a good chance; but then suddenly started going the pace. There had been nobody to hold him back from drinking and women, and he still had some hair-raising tales to tell them of hectic weeks on the coast with fair-skinned beauties who drank wine (that was their test of real life) or of riotous excursions to the course when rank outsiders swallowed up his hard-earned capital by the hundred. "Great days, boys!" he would say with attempted joviality, though his eyes belied him. "Well, I reckon I had my money's worth!" He would arrive some mornings very subdued, and it would appear then that the son he was living with had different ideas as to value for money, and had once more been telling the old man off about it. To lighten his depression he would want to toss Old Arthur, the ex-

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athlete, double or quits for the half-crown the son had loaned him. One woman he had known, who looked a nice little body, they thought—old though now like Bob himself—would come along and whisper to him gravely, eye him as though to see whether he took care of himself, and slip something into his hand. And Bob was not too modest to tell the company of the days when she had once given him more than that.

“Well,” averred Jimmy Noakes, suddenly, “their sins will find them out! Mark my words. The book says so—you can’t get away from that!”

He looked round defiantly, particularly at Snorty and Bob Bland, those confessed and unrepentant sinners. He had been at them on this subject often enough before.

“Tchah!” growled Snorty. “What’s the use o’ that if it don’t do no good while poor old Henry’s alive? D’yer think he’ll care what they go through afterwards? If they’re going to cop it,” he added dogmatically, “old Henry ought to know, so ‘e can enjoy it.”

“He wouldn’t enjoy it,” said Bill Pettit, “he’s not that kind!”

“No, I don’t believe ‘e would,” said Snorty, quite struck. Those absurdly bright blue eyes of his expressed admiration for Bill Pettit’s prescience.

Jimmy Noakes looked more severe than ever.

“No, o’ course not,” he said, sententiously, “nor no right-minded man would. Forgive your enemies, the book says. Forgive your enemies, do good to them that ‘ate you!”

“Oh, you’re too good to live, you are,” said Snorty. “I wouldn’t mind betting you’ve gone off the rails in your time, like the rest of us.” And he added crudely, “You look out! They say a deathbed repentance ain’t no use, anyway!”

Jimmy Noakes bowed before the storm.

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"I don't mind admittin'," he said solemnly, "as I've bin a mis'rable sinner in me time, but I've repented, an' I mean it, an' that'll carry weight with 'Im who knows all."

Old Arthur, struck by some faint parallel in his mind which he did not even attempt to make public, began to tell the rambling story of Go-to-Glory Albert, a one-time champion runner who, because he had once deceived the handicappers, suddenly sold all his silver pots and gave the proceeds to the Salvation Army. He wouldn't, it appeared, even allow his wife the wherewithal for a new dress out of the money, though he was out of work at the time and she pleaded hard.

They paid no attention to this story, nor did Old Arthur expect it. He knew he wanted to tell it, but then he was also aware that they'd heard it a score of times before. Each time he told it he rambled more than ever. But though it was boredom and weariness to them, owing to the sheer impossibilities of his style, they did allow he knew something about running, since he also had been a champion runner in his day. "Ah," would say Old Arthur, "if there'd been these International Sports then I'd have been in 'em. I'd have shewn 'em. What you could do from the standing start in the sprint, too! No idea they've got these days, believe me, no idea!" He would at this suddenly kick up his heels and pretend to be skipping. None of them could do this—they could do no more than limp and puff along to those two benches of theirs, so at these exhibitions they would tell him slyly, with slow chuckles, "You're marvellous for a young 'un, Arthur!"

"Ah, yes," said Jimmy Noakes again—he had been brooding over it—"Be sure your sins will find you out!"

"Sins!" queried Old Arthur indignantly. "It ain't no sin to run, is it?" At the same time he remembered a little

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uncomfortably that he'd bilked the handicappers more than once, and he didn't know how far Jimmy's knowledge extended. They were all afraid of those intolerant eyes. But he then saw that Jimmy's remark was not addressed to him, but had sprung from a withdrawal of his from the company into a reverie on the wickedness of the world.

It seemed, however, to find a home in the breast of Mr. Murray, if still not in Snorty's. Mr. Murray breathed a soft "Ah! that's right!" that seemed full of the conviction of experience. Snorty, the old reprobate, again grunted contemptuously, "Get along, the more the merrier! Never say die, even at seventy-five!" One could believe from those blue eyes of his that no ill had ever befallen him, not, at all events, as a result of his misdeeds. Snorty even felt he had a right to be aggrieved if a man who, he could swear, hadn't done as much time inside as he himself had made public references to his repentance. Snorty couldn't see that, on their records, other people had anything to repent.

"To 'ear yer, I reckon some o' you people thought more o' yer bit o' fun than doin' a real job o' work," grumbled Bill Pettit, the ex-hawker of vegetables. "Sixty year, man an' boy, I bin rahnd this yer town with a barrer, an' I ain't never done nothin' wot got me inside. Never 'ad no trouble wiv the pleece, eiver—licence alwis O.K. I useter worry abaht it. They was alwis tellin' me not to. An' now they won't let me 'ave a barrer no'ow. I'd go out termorer an' earn as good a livin' as the young 'uns I see goin' rahnd, if they'd let me. I ain't too old fer pushin'! Hu! I'd make 'em sit up, I reckon!" His hands and incredibly thin wrists were shaking as he spoke. Snorty winked at the others. They never contradicted Bill Pettit. His wife had been wheeled down there one day and had asked them not to, the effects of it were so bad for Bill. They had been eager

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to assure her how careful they would be. Her visit was an event they discussed, privately, for many a long day. They didn't get the other sex talking to them now, unless it was a grandchild to help one or other of them. Even then, though the girls might show willing, they wanted, despite the pennies that were pulled laboriously from the old one's pockets, to get away to play instead. The only other woman visitor among grown-ups was Bob Bland's friend, and her they did not much care about. What to them was this specimen ghost among so many that they did not now think of, or even remember?

When Old Henry arrived, at a wonderful pace for his eighty-three years, they greeted him one after the other, in the strung-out fashion they had on those benches. It made them feel more of a community if nobody missed this slow ritual. Time enough for missing it, they felt, when one of them could come no more. Bob Bland was still very specially concerned about Old Henry. He was looking pale and his thin face was like a crag. His eyes, dull to deadness lately, peered straight ahead as if nothing to the right or left mattered, but only the end that was coming to meet him.

Bob edged the conversation with Henry in the desired direction as soon as he decently could. "An' how did ye leave them at home?" he asked. "Did ye have yer breakfast wi' 'em this mornin'?"

The old man looked dejected. "No, 'is missis warn't up. Not as she'd 'ave given me a bite if she 'ad been, as like as not. She'll say 'There's the Corfee 'Ouse open for you. What more d'you want? Comin' botherin' a hard-workin' woman!' Sometimes she don't, though," he added, hopefully. He relapsed, his eyes went dead, and he said dully and inconsequently, "I've 'ad a rasher Sunday mornin's 'fore now."

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Bob turned to the others, his whole body expressive of his emotions.

“There y’are,” he said, “what did I tell yer?”

Old Henry had recovered himself a little, however. “But I got a wonnerful apple greengrocer Mudford, next the Corfee ’Ouse, give me! Me teeth ain’t much use fer it, but I’m a-savin’ o’ that up like. ’Minds me o’ they apples at me old ’ouse out at Pogglebury there. This little son o’ mine ’e useter climb they trees an’ ate a mort of ’em, ’e did, a mort of ’em!”

“Ain’t it crool!” said Bob Bland, in a violent stage whisper. “Ain’t it crool! An’ that’s the son wot pinches ’is money an’ starves ’im! Or ’is bitch of a wife!”

“Same thing,” said Snorty again. “I’d learn ’er!”

Bill Pettit, as an ex-expert, was examining the apple. He didn’t think a lot of it. “I’d let ye ’ave a barrer load better nor that,” he said quaveringly, but with a wonderful air, “but they won’t let me ’ave ’em now. No more barrers, they say, for me!” He trailed off mumbling. “But I’d show ’em a thing or two!”

Old Henry had reverted to his memory of the Sunday bacon. “I dedn’t ask for it,” he explained. “I don’t want a lot o’ meat,” he added, “not a lot o’ meat.—’Spose that mornin’ they had it to spare!”

“Where do yer get yer dinner?” questioned Bob Bland, almost threateningly.

“At the Corfee ’Ouse,” said Old Henry, on the defensive. He looked apologetic that the life in his old body had still, somehow or other, to be fed. “Just a bit o’ cake an’ so on, an’ a drink,” he mumbled, evasively.

They all looked sad. Bob Bland was nearly dancing with emotion. But old men can do nothing. And Mr. Murray had no remedy, apparently, in his fund of legal knowledge—

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there was not, so far as he knew, a society for the prevention of cruelty to old men.

Jimmy Noakes shook his head. "Judge not, that ye be not judged," he said. They were all thinking of the son and the son's wife, so that on this occasion they hadn't to ask him what he was talking about. Then he turned slowly to old Henry. "If Christ had been here, He would have given you twelve basketsful! And I tell you," his voice strengthened triumphantly, "he might sit down on one of these seats yet. At any time, miserable sinners as we are, we might have before us the Son of Man!"

"I ain't never seen J. C.," muttered Snorty, uncomfortably. The rest kept silent, uneasily, rather ashamed.

After their midday farewells, the group did not meet again till the following morning. A boisterous sou'wester sprang at the town from the hills, rattling its ancient buildings, choking the gutters and sweeping the sidewalks clear of people and refuse alike. The deserted seats of the old men stood in pools. The storm lasted on into the evening, but night came peaceful over all the country and moonlight bathed the town.

The next morning the spring sun shone early, and the old men rejoiced in it. They moved their bones the livelier. Old Arthur was kicking up his heels and talking jauntily of breaking his record for the hundred when a vanman came up, looked at the group hard and then spoke aside to Mr. Murray. "'E 'adn't a chance, pore old chap," they heard him say. "An' it was Mr. Withers who said you'd know all about 'im, so I thought—as 'ow—well, I'd pop along 'n let you know, as 'e was a friend of yours like. 'E's lyin' in the mortuary now."

They caught at those last words painfully.

"Who's that?" asked Bill Pettitt, with a dry mouth.  
"Sorry if it's a friend of yours, Mr. Murray."

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Mr. Murray looked at them all quietly.

“It’s old Henry,” he said.

Perfect stillness fell on the group. The old men’s faces, turned towards him, would have made a study for Raphael.

“Seems he was knocked down last night crossing the road,” said Mr. Murray with difficulty. “Got his head down in the wind and rain an’ didn’t see a motor-van.”

The silence was broken shockingly by Bob Bland: “An’ whose fault was it ‘e was out in it?” he almost shouted, “tell me that! A son of ‘is, eh, that ‘e bred an’ brought up, stayin’ snug an’ warm in ‘is house, an’ the old chap out in that? Any of youse out in it?”

They all shook their heads.

“No, of course! Nobody our age, nor most younger ones either!”

The silence was broken by old Jimmy Noakes going down on his knees stiffly by the bench. They heard the word “Christ” and looked at one another uncomfortably. They did not quite know what to say about this Death that lay in such close wait for them.

But Jimmy Noakes got up again, and his eyes nearly burned them. His face worked uncontrollably. “Pray for him, pray for him,” he stammered, then added between a shout and a sob these blasphemous words, signal of the shockingly sudden relapse of the old man into a state of sin. “I’m going to the fun’ral, and if that cursed Irish devil is there I’ll push her in the grave!”

They looked at him startled, then sat on in the sun. The end would come for the rest of them before long, and it would do them no good to get too excited.

## *Captain*

CAPTAIN had been born in the mine and never been out of it. Not even to the grey hospital-stable—for he had never had an accident—where so many of his fellows waited for their wounds to heal. Horses were there with puckered scars sometimes eighteen inches long tracing uneven courses through great, bare patches of skin that looked like grey leather. And crater-like wounds large enough to put one's fist in. One horse had a distinct step in its face that looked ludicrously like a broken nose. Their eyes and actions expressed a pathetic appeal to passers-by to rub the affected parts and ease the irritation. That is, those who had eyes. Leather masks with one eye-aperture covered by another piece of leather were frequent, and in one case both eyes were covered. The horse had tried to turn in a confined space, and slender splinters of wood had protruded from a broken post . . .

A haulier sat on a thick post that lay beside the tramlines of the "double-parting." Captain stood near him, silent and alert, with sensitive body quivering in response to sound or movement, no matter how minute or indistinct. On the opposite tramroad—at this point the rails lying along the gallery of the mine swelled into a double road to allow for

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the passing of traffic—a journey of trams of coal waited to be taken to the pit. Meditatively fingering the dull steel hook that took the place of his left arm, the arm that had been removed in a Casualty Clearing Station in France, he mourned for the lost freedom it symbolised.

The rattle of Captain's harness brought him back to realities. Captain was his friend and had been since their first day together when the horse had kicked down the partition of the stall in the ammonia-smelling, beetle-haunted stable. Since then he had been the only man able to work him. He wondered whether the daily packet of potato peelings he brought to the pit was part of the reason.

The sound of the arriving journey of empty trams brought the haulier to his feet. The steel rope that had hummed beside his feet familiarly enough to be ignored buzzed into silence. Then another rattle and the trams came into the parting. The full journey went out.

Quietly the haulier fastened his "gun" to the hitching-plate of the innermost tram.

"Captain," he said commandingly.

The horse shook himself and his harness jingled.

"Cap!" the haulier barked at him. "Stamback!"

Gingerly the horse stepped back a pace. The man slipped his hook around the metal shafts that hung from the horse's back. "Stamback!" he repeated. The horse backed further and the "gun" was pinned to the shafts.

"Now stand still!" the haulier commanded, hooking up his lamp. As he did so two officials' oil-lamps twinkled ruddily in the blackness towards where the coal-face lay. They belonged to the fireman and his deputy. Without heeding them the haulier went back the distance of six trams and made to unhitch the shackle.

Crash!

## CAPTAIN

With a terrific roar the roof came tumbling down. The parting was filled with a blinding cloud of grey-brown-white dust. The fireman and his deputy stopped dead. Then came a silence like the grave.

“Christ!” the deputy whispered.

“D’you see a light when we came round the turn?” the fireman asked shakily, his own light almost obscured by the thick dust.

“Aye,” came the reply. “Ted’s I expect.”

As the dust settled they approached the jagged edge of the roof above the fall which rose in a huge, clay-coloured pyramid of big stones.

“Ted,” the fireman shouted towards the apex of the pyramid.

There was no reply.

“Ted.”

Still no reply.

“TED.”

“Hul-lo,” came a faint response.

“Are—you—all—right?”

“Yes—but—the—horse—is—under—the—fall.”

Even as the words reached the official’s ears the sound of a mighty struggle for breath rose from the piled-up boulders. It came like the rattle of a faulty engine.

Handing his lamp to the deputy he shouted back. “Get Twm an’ Will Fry an’ Dick Flagon an’ Ben Ames’ an’—an’ everybody from up the right ’and.”

His assistant put the lamp down in a safe place and scuttled away on his mission.

“Tell ’em to bring their shovels,” the fireman called after him, commencing to lift a huge boulder.

He worked furiously, lifting stones he would otherwise never have tried to handle alone. He swore feelingly as his

## JACK GRIFFITH

hands were torn and sweat poured down his face, washing coal-dust into his smarting eyes. Fortunately the horse had been buried near the edge of the fall. Its head was released long before help arrived. But even as the rescuers put down their lamps and reached forward their black, shining bodies another mass of earth and stones came tumbling from above. The fireman fled for safety, a trail of blood from where a stone had struck him mingling with the sweat.

Captain seemed to know that he was being rescued, for he remained quite still while the men worked. But repeated falls showered upon his head overcame his patience and with a shrill neigh he strove to pull himself free, beating his head from side to side as he did so, striking sharp boulders with his jowl and cheek.

“Good God!” muttered a man whose fair hair grotesquely contrasted with his black face and white eyeballs. “He’s like a bloody butcher-shop underneath.”

Holding up his lamp the starred light exposed the horse’s broken head and jaw. Long, deep gashes gaped and poured out thick, dark blood, which caught the sweat and dust from the matted hair and hot atmosphere.

Again Captain tried to shake his agonised head violently but the collier caught the slippery cheek-piece. Failing to restrain the action he slid, feet first, on his back down the side of the fall. His hands still clung to the elusive leather above his head.

Borrowing a cap with which to aid his grip he returned to the difficult task.

The workmen toiled incessantly, like glistening gnomes. Their bright lamps sent dazzling rays upon a scene that might have been a picture of the interior of the Hill of Trolls. Their legs and stiff, heavy boots were obscured in the shadowed gloom below the lamplight.

## CAPTAIN

By the time the horse's back had been cleared the farrier arrived. At heart the farrier was pleasant and amiable, but lived in constant fear of losing dignity if he spoke to workmen. So he tugged at his waxed moustaches instead.

Taking an instrument from its case he tapped the horse along the spine. Whether he received the desired response no one knew, as his only outward expression was a cough. Then he sat upon a stone and waited.

The men struggled and toiled, talking in bursts and discussing more suitable ways of releasing the imprisoned animal. They sweated and swore and gave their opinions of money-grubbing coal-owners who denied them the safety to which they were entitled. Captain appeared to be behaving more sensibly, for his efforts at self-release were less frequent. The tired man who held his head had merely to keep a firm hand on the blood-soaked cheek-piece. Suddenly the horse's head fell sideways. The man became expectant, anticipating another burst of beating, but the head simply hung down limply. Scared, the miner removed his hand, and the head lolled forward.

"He's dead! He's dead!" the man cried, scrambling down the side of the fall.

"Ho!" the farrier grunted, then after another brief examination he made to return by the roundabout way he had come. He was grateful, however, that the horse had died quickly. He had known that its death was inevitable, but had been afraid to destroy it humanely. He couldn't risk killing a horse, no matter how bad it was. They were costly and jobs were scarce . . .

The haulier was sitting on a post, aware of the uselessness brought about by his missing hand. The farrier passed.

"All over?" the haulier asked.

"Yes," was the reply. "Not too soon, either."

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“ I’ve met men like that,” the one-armed man said, thoughtfully scoring the dust with his heel.

“ Like what? ”

“ Like that ” he indicated the scene of the accident with a jerk of the head. “ Go all through life without having a single tap. But when it *did* come—all over.”

## LAURENCE HOLEBECK

# *The Spy*

HERE is one figure which has been haunting me strangely this last year. It is that of an old Jacobite lady, Mrs. Swinburne, and I cannot forget the reception she gave me. I had gone to see her after her only son had died in Newgate, where he had been imprisoned after the failure at Preston. Although it is forty years ago, I can see that proud and broken-hearted woman standing at her door, and I can hear her words.

“The best thing I can wish you, John Whitfield,” she said, “is that you may come to envy Ned his death. And never come here again.” I know that what she said, many felt, and so I tell this story.

It was late in the October of 1715 when I entertained three gentlemen, neighbours of mine, to supper at my house of Stonerigg. The room in which we sat is the same wherein I write this. To-day the sun is warm and there are the noises of haymaking in the meadow outside, so that the room is cheerful enough. That October night, although there was a bright fire burning on the hearth, it seemed gloomy and chill.

My house is situate about two miles west of the town of Blanchland, in Northumberland. My guests had all ridden

some distance that night. Mr. Errington had come from the other side of Hexham, Mr. Milburn from Allendale, and Mr. Featherston from Grayhopeshield in Weardale. You will understand that the cause of our meeting was political. Word had reached our country of the rising of our Jacobite friends in Scotland under the Earl of Mar, and in Northumberland under Mr. Thomas Forster of Bamborough. We were, all of us, connected with the cause of His Majesty James III—I call him “ His Majesty ” although I have long abandoned the idle ceremony of drinking to the King “ over the water ”—and we had met to decide upon our future action.

Mr. Errington rose, and, asking my pardon, put another log on the fire. He was a man well over fifty, tall and thin featured. His hair was grey, but he was as active as any man in the North Country. Popularity, however, never seemed to come to him, though he was a very honest gentleman, and of good family. This might be because he was a Papist, or, again, because he was so contemptuous and openly scornful of what he styled the cowardice of his neighbours. If few liked him, many admired him ; and some feared him.

“ Well, gentlemen,” he said (he was formal in his speech and averse from using our Christian names) ; “ I take it that our best plan is to march west. Forster seems to be making that way, and Tynedale is dangerous for those of our opinions, with these troops of horse coming out of Newcastle. What do you say to our assembling at Alston on Monday ? ” He spoke boldly, as a man who sees no doubts.

There was silence, and I felt that I, as host, was bound to speak next, although I was the youngest in years. I was the youngest, too, in conspiracy. My family, the Whitfields of Stonerigg, had taken little share in politics. They had always been Church and King men, however, and my father,

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Nicholas Whitfield, had never been well reconciled to King William III. In his later days he had come to take an active part in Jacobite schemes, and after his death in 1711 I had succeeded to his politics as well as to his estate. I was eighteen then, and a lad of eighteen finds conspiracy as good a game as courting. I was soon involved deeply in Mr. Errington's plots, and although, during the last two years I had been more discreet, I knew that I might well be reckoned a trustworthy Jacobite.

I felt it my place, I repeat, to speak first, but I had little to say. So I avoided the main question and spoke about the details. I suggested that we should ride to the south of Alston. I questioned Mr. Errington about our friends in Teesdale. Then I added, weakly, "If we are to join Mr. Forster at all."

Mr. Errington was a stern man, standing there by the fire in his weathered blue riding coat. "Do you think, sir," he said, "that this is the time to decide whether or not to support His Majesty? A year ago your hesitation might have been ascribed, honestly, to doubt. Since then you have so far pledged yourself that it will be put down, I fear, to another motive."

I could find nothing to say in answer, but Cuthbert Featherston stepped into my place. He was a quiet man, plainly dressed. His deriders called him more of a farmer than a gentleman, but his honesty and soberness of judgment had made him a man of wide influence whom either party would be glad to gain.

"A moment, Mr. Errington," he said. "We lack one of your motives for supporting King James. We three are Protestants, and, I think, all well content with the religious settlement as it stands to-day." Mr. Errington bowed. "Now," went on Cuthbert, "we have two things to consider:

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whether this rising is of such a character that we should be right in joining it ; and whether it has so much chance of success that we are justified in risking our estates and the happiness of our families.”

I saw Mr. Errington looked angry, but he knew that he could not beat down Cuthbert Featherston as he had beaten me down. He took a pace or two about the room and then said, “ I think, Mr. Featherston, that there is only one question where you find two. If we think that the cause is just, no consideration of our estates should let us desert it.”

“ I don’t agree with you,” said Featherston. “ I am for King James because he is the rightful King, and because I think that England would be better in his hands than in the hands of a foreigner. But it will do the country no good to throw away the lives of its gentlemen so that they may be supplanted by Whigs.”

At this point Nick Milburn spoke. It is a strange reflection upon political conspiracy that of the three men in whose company I was planning to risk my fortune, one I feared and one I disliked. I disliked Milburn. He was the heir to a large property, that of Pikeland, in Allendale. His father was old, and, they said, out of his mind, and so Nick had practically stepped into his shoes. He was a man fond of company, and with a large acquaintance. He was well known for his dexterity in all sports, and especially was he a bold horseman. But this alone would not have won him such a measure of influence in a country where gallant riders were not rare, and are not rare now. He had been in London for some years, had mixed with the finest gentlemen and ladies, had held his own in a bloody duel, and had been attached to the household of His Grace the Duke of Ormonde. With this nobleman he had been in the Low Countries at the end of the late campaign, but he had not, so far as I knew,

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been engaged in battle. I had always disliked him. His air of patronage towards his native country I found offensive, his treatment of me smacked of condescension, and his attitude of gallantry towards my sister, Mary, angered me most of all. He was well dressed that night, a strong, arrogant, black-browed man, near thirty years old.

“I have something to say. I will leave Mr. Featherston to his points of principle. But this I will say: the rising is not being conducted as it should be. I know both Forster and Derwentwater. I say nothing against them, except that neither is a soldier. Even now, as I heard to-day, they are refusing to enrol the men who would join them. It’s madness. Moreover, the whole of the strategy is wrong. The Earl of Mar should first have subdued Scotland. Then he should have crossed the border, and King James would have had one army instead of two or three little brigades.” Milburn spoke with decision and emphasised his words by banging his bottle on the table.

Cuthbert Featherston liked Milburn no better than I did. But he assented to what he had said. It has always been my failing that I am impressed by the last speaker, and I added my agreement. After that there was a silence. I remember that Featherston walked to the window and opened the shutters. He muttered that it was snowing hard, and I knew that for the moment he was more concerned about his sheep than about King James. All this time I had been watching Mr. Errington. He had been thinking deeply, and suddenly he raised his head with the air of a man who has made up his mind. The one talent for which I can claim credit is a certain power of observation which I possess, and I believe that I followed more closely the working of Mr. Errington’s mind than the other two men in the room. I was filled with admiration then for the force and

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clearness of his argument. I have since heard Sir Robert Walpole and Mr. Pitt, and I have read something of Lord Bolingbroke's. Yet I have never heard or read words so impressive as those which Mr. Errington spoke in this room forty-three years ago. He recognised that Cuthbert Featherston was the strongest of his three opponents, and to him he first addressed himself. "I have spoken," he said, "somewhat rashly about the risk. I recognise now that perhaps all you gentlemen have more to lose than I have. And you, Mr. Featherston, are a married man. Now, there is always a risk, but I believe that it is no bigger in this case than in other insurrections which have been successful. I believe, moreover, that our strategy is sound. If the Earl of Mar had first subdued Scotland the Government would have had time to place the North under control. It is this breaking out of rebellion at half a dozen different points at once which will win our cause. Let each of our forces gain a victory. Then let them unite, and you will see that when we march on London there will be no opposition. This rising has all the motives which you will find in any rising for King James. There is no wish to tyrannize in the manner of foreign despots, and no wish to upset that form of religion which God, in His wisdom, would seem to have decreed for this country. There is no desire to truckle to France. We rise because we believe that the King of England should be a native, and not a foreigner; that the wealth of England may be preserved, and that her blood and money be not wasted in foreign wars for foreign ends; that the gentlemen of England have their rightful superiority over Dissenting merchants and Dutchmen. The cause we rise in, gentlemen, is the cause God favours. Let us decide to follow a course of which we may be proud. It is always a gain to do one's duty. And in this case it is an easy gain. You are well

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settled at Grayhopeshield, Mr. Featherston, but Mr. Milburn and Mr. Whitfield are young men, who seek, maybe, rank and honour. They will find both when King James rewards his friends.

“Neither Derwentwater nor Forster is a soldier. True. But Oxburgh and Gascoigne are soldiers, and good ones. Remember, every year that passes makes it harder and more dangerous to strike a blow for the King.” He went on in this strain for some minutes. I was able to divide his argument into three parts and to see that a part was addressed to each one of us. He talked to Featherston about the righteousness of the rising, to Milburn about its chance of success, and to me about its romance. Although I saw how carefully the appeals were made the speech thrilled me to a degree which an old man can ill describe. I found myself repeating, “He either fears his fate too much, or his deserts are small,” and when Mr. Errington heard this he turned to me with a smile that for once was not grim. Then we both looked at Featherston. He was seated, staring down at the table, with his head in his hands. The candlelight played in the hollows of his weatherbeaten face. He sat still for some time after Errington had finished. Then he rose, like a great dog coming out of water, and said, “Mr. Errington, you have convinced me. I am at your service, and the King’s. I have been slow in making up my mind. I trust that you will not find me slow in what lies before us.”

Mr. Errington made one of his stately foreign bows. He felt sure, he said, that Mr. Featherston would step into that place of leadership which was his by right. He was the more glad to have had the honour to bring certain facts to Mr. Featherston’s notice, as he believed that what Mr. Featherston thought to-day all the North Country would think to-morrow. Lastly, Nick Milburn said that he was

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with us, of course, and so I had some more wine brought in, and the fire made up.

My own feelings were a mixture of depression with an odd, irrational happiness. The raw night outside the shutters made my house seem doubly secure, and any departure from it very comfortless. Yet I was young and strong and I truly believed, then, that the rising was likely to succeed. I have thought since of many a North-country lad who must have felt as I felt, during that month of October, who acted as I did not, and died afterwards away from his own countryside, by axe, or fever, or an exile's creeping, nameless death.

We had all pulled our chairs round the fire and were well flushed with wine and heat. Mr. Errington was speaking of the travels of his youth very eloquently ; Nick Milburn was ready with some Low Country adventure of his own ; Cuthbert Featherston was sitting half-absorbed, when my sister Mary opened the door.

“I am sorry to disturb you, gentlemen,” she said, “but there’s someone knocking at the door. Are we to open it, John ?” It is not often that a traveller comes to Stonerigg, but we do not neglect the duties of hospitality. I went to the door myself and unbolted it. When I opened it I saw a man all in white, and very weary, holding the bridle of his horse. The snow was near four inches deep already. The stranger shook some of the snow from his hat and cape before he spoke. Then he said, “ May I crave your hospitality, sir, for my horse and myself, until such time as it is possible to travel again ? You see the night.” He was a young man of my own height, by his tongue a south Englishman, by his bearing a gentleman.

I cannot tell whether it was the tone of his voice, or his words, or something about him less easily defined, but I

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was at once very much attracted to him. If I were to choose one word to describe him I would say "gallant." I do not intend to suggest swagger or "gallantry," but there was about him, even in his exhaustion, a very taking air of modest gaiety. He was what the French would call *un galant homme*.

I was the more pleased when, upon my granting his request, he insisted upon seeing to his horse before he attended to his own comfort. Then he came in. I gave him dry clothes of my own, and invited him to refresh himself with the four of us in the sitting-room.

He was a very fair man, my guest, as I believe many men are in the south of England. His face was handsome, though not effeminate, and his features were good. His name, he said, was Talbot. My other guests, even the dandy Milburn, seemed for the moment very dull beside him. It was not that he gave himself airs, but his bearing had a mixture of ingenuousness and experience of the world, which made us countrymen seem heavy ; and yet his modesty prevented any thought of jealousy.

Mr. Talbot explained that he had been travelling from Scotland, and had meant to spend the night in the inn at Blanchland, where he had engaged himself to meet a friend on the morrow. His family, he said, lived in Gloucestershire, and this was his first visit to the north. Soon the rather depressed spirits of our party were enlivened. We made free with wine and jest, and it was pleasant to have our dismal conspiracy interrupted by this open-hearted lad. I call him lad. He could not be older than I was, and he might be a few months younger.

Mr. Errington asked him whether he had been abroad. He answered that he had been in France since the conclusion of the peace. Then Milburn would have the news of London, and the doings and sayings of all the fine people.

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With many of these, it appeared, Mr. Talbot was well acquainted. He was not a mere rattle, because he displayed an acquaintance with books that none of us could pretend to. And with all this he was as modest, as shy, almost, as a country lad who has never left his father's parsonage.

We had been drinking for some time, and Nick Milburn was far from sober. Suddenly, after emptying his glass he shouted out, with scant ceremony, "Mr. Talbot, I'll ask you a question. Are you for the King?" I saw hesitation in Talbot's eyes. "The King?" he said. "Aye, by God," said Milburn, "The King, King James."

I have spoken, perhaps immodestly, of my powers of observation. In that instant I saw a doubt in my guest's eyes. Then it passed, and he answered, standing on his feet, "Sir, I am for King James, God bless him." Milburn gave him a drunken handshake, and the rest of us bowed.

Mr. Errington, however, was an old and cautious conspirator. He would have passed on to other subjects, but Mr. Talbot, now that he had declared himself, seemed eager to talk of politics. So presently Mr. Errington said, "I have no doubt, sir, of your loyalty to the King. But these are troublous times, and we must be careful. Are you willing to reassur us?"

Far from being offended at this question Mr. Talbot was quite ready to satisfy us. He said that, while it was true that he was of Gloucestershire birth, he had been sent, as a boy to the court of King James in France. He had landed in Scotland last year and had since been actively engaged in His Majesty's cause. His present mission was to engage the support of some of the leading gentlemen of the North. He had personal letters to some of them from the King. His method was to seek the support of the chief men, to gain their written promises of help, or tokens that would be

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recognised as equivalent to such promises, and to use them to carry over the waverers. By this means, he said, he had been very successful.

“I congratulate you on that,” said Mr. Errington, “but I must say that your method seems imprudent, and one that would prove uncomfortable to many loyal gentlemen if you were taken.”

“I own there is a risk,” said Mr. Talbot, “but I lessen it in this way. It is my custom to seek in each district I visit the house of a gentleman whom I am recommended to trust, and who lives in a sufficiently secluded spot. I lie there, and have word sent to our friends in the neighbourhood. They visit me in my retreat, and there I show them the letters of His Majesty, and the promises I have received. The only risk is during the journeys I make from one house to another. That cannot be avoided.”

“Then may I suppose,” I said, “that your arrival here was not an accident?” Mr. Talbot bowed. Then he proposed to toast the King, and when this had been done, continued, “It is only fair, gentlemen, that I should let you see the letters of which I spoke.” They were cunningly secreted about his person, four of them in all. Two of them were from known Tories, but the others from professed Whigs, one of them a very great man indeed. There were also two letters signed by the King. I must confess that my spirits rose amazingly when I had read all these, and I do not doubt that I should have promised my support then if I had not done so before.

After this we gave Mr. Talbot our confidence fully. He had a very exact knowledge of our prospects to the northward, which, he said, were good. At his request we described to him what we knew of our chances and supporters in the near parts of Durham and Cumberland, and the south

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of Northumberland. Even Cuthbert Featherston, under Mr. Talbot's influence, proved a very active and strangely cheerful conspirator.

You know how a room changes in its atmosphere without a movement being made in it. An hour ago this one seemed cold and bare. Now it was most comfortable. So comfortable was it that we must have Mary in to sing us a song. But she would not, and ran into the kitchen. I said that I would follow her and persuade her. Nick Milburn said, "Shall I come and help you?" I liked him at that moment less than ever, and I replied "Two young fellows will never persuade a girl. Will you come, Mr. Errington?" I need not have asked him. I could well have gone myself. If there is any one moment that we can point to, and say, "The tragedy began here; after this it could not be stopped," this was the moment. I believe that I was made or marred then. Whether it made, or marred me I cannot say. I have been blessed with a happy marriage and a family of which I am proud. I am accounted a rich man, and, I believe, a wise one. I have travelled a little and read much. So perhaps it is as well—only, as I say it, as I try to believe it, I know that it is not. Yet though I know when the mistake was made, the doing of it was so inevitable that I can hardly call it a mistake.

We found Mary in the kitchen alone, for the servants had gone to bed. "John," she said to me at once, "you men are bad conspirators. Here is a secret letter, and I find it on the stair-head." I admit that I started. She gave me the letter, and when I saw the word "Secret" written at the top I knew that it was none of mine. Incautiously I said so. "Then whose is it?" said Mr. Errington. "Is it another letter of that lad's? He is the most reckless agent the cause has." It was indeed a letter of the lad's. I cannot recall it

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all now. Perhaps I did not read it all. But so much I did read, and can remember : " Through your information we have been enabled to frustrate the designs of the rebels in the eastern borders. You are hereby directed to ride south, and gain what information you can of the district around Hexham. Use the methods which you find to be the best. Your services are known in a very high quarter and will be generously recognised." The letter was directed to " Lieutenant Talbot, at the Black Bull Inn, at Newcastle-on-Tyne : by special messenger." It was signed " Townshend," the name of one of King George's chief ministers. Was ever minister more careless or agent so bold ?

My mind acts more quickly than my resolution. I realised that Talbot must have dropped that letter as he was coming downstairs. I understood what it meant, that he was an agent of the government, an audacious and successful spy, and that we had put ourselves into his hands. But I could not decide what to do. I might treat the letter as a trifle and deal with Talbot myself. But that would not be fair to the three other men whose lives and fortunes were involved in the affair. So I handed the letter to Mr. Errington. He was a brave man, but had paled a little. Then he turned to my sister and said, " Mistress Mary, we will excuse the song to-night. We have still much to talk of, and we keep you from your rest."

Mary stood up, and put her hand on my arm. " Jack, what's wrong ? Mr. Errington, tell me. What is it ? I know it's no letter of yours. I think it belongs to the strange gentleman, and I was going to take it to him when you came in." We were both silent, and then she guessed, " Oh, is there something wrong about him ? Is he a . . ." Mr. Errington completed the sentence. " Yes, a spy."

" Then," said Mary, " you are all betrayed. Oh, John,

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why did you meddle with this bad business?"

"We are discovered, I fear," said Mr. Errington, "but not beyond hope, so long as the discoverer is still here."

"What are you going to do with him? Imprison him?"

"No," said Mr. Errington, "I am going to kill him."

It was a natural thing to say. Then, as I thought of that man, a stranger and my guest, sitting not three yards away, and doomed, I was revolted. This killing would be a murder. Mary was before me with her argument. "You can't kill him. You must imprison him. You must put him safely away until King James has won. Then what he's heard won't hurt anyone. But you can't kill him. He's only a boy."

"No," said Mr. Errington, "he must be killed to-night. I like the business no better than you do, but it is inevitable. For one thing I doubt whether he could be kept here safely. Stonerigg is a lonely house, but news spreads. You would soon have a magistrate and a band of searchers. But if I knew that he could be hidden where no one could find him I would still kill him, because he has betrayed me. He has put an unpardonable insult upon me."

"But see," I said. "You mean that he came into this house with the intention of learning our secrets. Mr. Errington, I believe upon my honour, and I would swear it, that he came here with no thought of evil. Whatever he has done elsewhere he intended nothing evil here. We might have been sitting there yet without a word spoken on politics if Milburn hadn't started the question. Then it must have seemed to him too good an opportunity to be missed."

"I might believe you," said Mr. Errington, "and it would make no difference. He must not be suffered to live, because he is a danger to the cause."

I was madly angry then. "The cause!" "The cause!"

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Would "the cause" have me stand by and see murder done in my own house? "And suppose I would prevent your designs, Mr. Errington?" I shouted.

"You will not leave this room until you give me your word not to hinder me," he replied. Then he turned the key in the door, and stood near it, and made ready to draw his sword.

I was no fencer, yet in very desperation I would have fought him. But Mary called "What's that?" An outer door was being hastily unbolted. It was someone who didn't know the bolts and was fumbling with them. It was Talbot.

Mr. Errington was out of the door before me and I heard him draw his sword as he turned the corner of the passage. "Your bird's flying," he cried. "He's flown," said Mary, for we saw, at the end of the passage, nothing but a great stretch of white snow. What were we to do now? Featherston and Milburn had come out of the sitting-room, disturbed by the noise, and Mr. Errington told them how matters stood. Milburn swore and threatened, and I could see that he was desperately afraid. But it was a fear that only Talbot's death could assuage. "We must take him," said Featherston, so we loaded our pistols and went out.

There was no snow falling for the moment, and the night was not very dark. The marks of shoes could be seen very clearly, and as soon as I saw them I realised that Talbot had little chance of escape. The natural fall of the ground and the direction of the footmarks led to a quarry. I have been told that from this quarry was taken the stone to build Stonerigg, but it has been long disused. The man who took this path would, in about twenty minutes find himself face to face with a great cliff. A madman would not attempt to climb it. Talbot would reach this cliff, and would then turn

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on his tracks and try to find some way out of the quarry. Our plan was simple. There was a path, hazardous save to an active man, which led from Stonerigg to the top of the quarry cliff. Mr. Errington, who was the best shot of our party, was to take this path by which he would arrive at his post in ten minutes. There he was to await Talbot and fire at him. If he did not kill him he would at least drive him back towards the three of us, who were to work down the falling ground about fifty yards apart.

I believe that I thought of little for a few moments except the discomfort of walking in snow with light shoes on my feet. Then I braced myself to the work in hand and began to scan the snow for a figure running towards me. If Talbot came he must come in little over ten minutes. And when he came I must shoot him, or stop him and let the others shoot him.

I walked forward very slowly with my pistol in my right hand. I think, however, that I must have walked faster than Featherston, and we had gradually gone farther apart. I was reflecting on this, I remember, with an odd satisfaction, and with the hope that Talbot might not come my way, when I saw a man standing within five yards of me. If Talbot had had a pistol he could have shot me dead.

I did not fire. I was too startled to move. I did not move at once when he, who had been standing like a frozen man, suddenly fell down in the snow at my feet.

You will say, you who read this, that an old man's mind should be a treasure-house of wisdom, and not, as mine is, a gallery of pictures. What pictures I can see now! This one I can see above all: a great stretch of snow, and a face as pale, and while everything in the world save my own heart stopped still, Talbot's eyes opening and his lips moving a little. I knelt down beside him, and I heard the last six

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words he said. They were these. "Guest . . . never meant . . . chance . . . orders . . . sorry." "Guest . . . never meant . . . chance . . . orders . . . sorry." I have spoken no words so often since, for I believe that I have repeated them every day of my life. Talbot had been shot down two hundred miles from his home. His friends would never know his fate. As he died he had apologised to me, whose hospitality he had abused.

I was still kneeling there when I realised that Cuthbert Featherston was standing over me. "I thought I heard a shot at this side. Here's Milburn," he said. I rose from the ground and put a handkerchief over the dead man's face. Milburn was nearly mad with joy when he saw the body. I was too busy thinking of my own share in this business to speak to him. But when he pulled away the handkerchief, and cried, "You've got your wages, you damned Hanoverian spy," and spat in the face of the dead man, I went forward and knocked him down with the butt end of my pistol.

Featherston had raised Milburn up and was putting snow on his brow when Mr. Errington returned. "Has he shown fight?" he asked, when he saw Milburn stunned, "I shot him in the stomach. I hardly thought he'd have come so far as this." No one replied, and he asked, sharply, "What's the matter?"

Featherston looked at me and so I spoke. I said, "I knocked Milburn down because he spat in this dead man's face."

"That was not the act of a gentleman of the north-country," said Mr. Errington. "You acted very properly. Is that all?"

"No," I said, "it is not all. Mr. Errington, you may call me a traitor where I stand. You may call me a coward and I will fight you for the word. But I renounce your

cause now. I will have no more to do with rebellion for King James or any king. I have seen to-night the most awful thing that could be. I have seen a brave man hunted down like an animal. This is your cause. Is it worth it? Is any cause worth it? Are all your scheming politics worth it? All the good that rebellion could do would not make up for the loss of a life like this. I'm not blaming you. I'm blaming myself. I'm younger than you, but I had half a glimmering of something amiss when Milburn asked him that question. I believe he hesitated before he answered. I should have said enough to warn him. But it's done now, and he's dead, and we're four murderers. You may call me what you please, but I will have no more to do with murdering. I must beg your help to bury him."

Mr. Errington was ready to answer me, but, instead, he bent down and helped us to carry the corpse. Milburn followed unsteadily behind. We stripped Talbot of the clothes which I had lent him, and dressed him in his own. It must be seldom that a dead man is put into newly warmed clothes. Mary had had them well dried. We burnt all his papers. Then we buried him.

Within two hours we were back again in the sitting-room where the fire was dead; four, where there had been five. "I suppose," said Mr. Errington to me, "that we can trust to your personal honour to reveal nothing." I bowed assent. "Then," said he, "I think that concludes our meeting. I must thank you for your hospitality. Who rides my way?" Without waiting for an answer he walked out to the stables, and Milburn followed him. Cuthbert Featherston stayed for a minute. "I'm not so quick as you, lad," he said, "I don't see so much. What you said is right, for you. It would be hypocrisy to say that it is right for me. I liked that poor fellow, but it was his life or ours, and this

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business hasn't altered what Errington said at the beginning of the night. So I'm still for King James. Give an eye to Grayhopeshield while I'm away, and, remember, whichever way it goes for me, that I don't reproach you, and never will."

As it happened, Featherston never joined the rebels. He was not a young man, and the exposure of that night gave him a chill, of which he died a week later. The last time I saw him alive, his wife for a few minutes left his bedside. He told me then what had happened in the room after Mr. Errington and I had gone to seek Mary. Talbot had said something about another paper which he wished to show them. So he had turned out his pockets and searched through all the papers. Then he had sat silent for a moment. At last he said, that he would go and see whether he had left it upstairs. I do not think that the agony of his death can have been so terrible to him as the agony of that minute when he realised that he had lost Townshend's letter. I am not sure what happened after that. Perhaps he lost his nerve and ran for the door at once.

This, then, is the reason why I deserted the Jacobite cause in the year 1715, and why I allowed my friends to ride to Preston without me. Had it not been for Talbot's coming I would have gone, and died, no doubt, as Errington and Milburn died. Of the five people who knew the truth of that night's doings I am the only one alive, for Mary died two years ago. You may think that my writing this long story is an acknowledgment of the insufficiency of my excuse. In a sense that is true. If the reason which I gave had satisfied me fully I might never have written this account. Yet it satisfied me for a long time. Even now, if I pretend to talk about a little evil for the sake of a great good, I see Talbot's face white with death and hear his last apology.

## Quinette's crime<sup>1</sup>

[Continued from our March Issue]

For a synopsis of the previous instalments see page 549

It was nearly half-past six, and Quinette was getting ready to put up his shutters when a policeman came into his shop.

He had scarcely time to be alarmed. The policeman handed him a document, and said, in a friendly tone :

“I think it's asking you to call. You might see if there's any reply.”

Quinette opened the letter. It was from the superintendent and requested him to call at his office as soon as possible.

“I'll come at once. Tell the superintendent that I just want to shut up my shop and then I'll be along.”

“Oh, don't hurry yourself! He won't mind waiting.”

The policeman saluted and departed.

Quinette said to himself sternly :

“I refuse to be alarmed. This summons is the normal consequence of my call this morning. I don't even want to try to imagine what they've got to say to me there. The best way to be prepared is to arrive with a perfectly easy mind.”

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<sup>1</sup>From *Men of Good Will* by Jules Romains. Translated from the French by Warre B. Wells. (Lovat Dickson, Large Crown 8vo. 8s. 6d. net)

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In the lobby of the police-station he met the orderly who had brought him the note.

"Oh, there you are. Come this way."

They went up to the first floor.

"I'll go and say you're here."

The orderly was back in a few moments and ushered Quinette into a little office where there were two men: one, sitting down, whom the bookbinder did not know; and another, standing up, who was the inspector whom he had met that morning. The two men were studying a score or so of little photographs, spread out on the table like a pack of cards, in the circle of light cast downwards by a green cardboard shade.

As Quinette came in the man who was sitting down assembled the photographs into a pack.

"Good evening, monsieur," said the inspector. "I have got together from all directions a certain number of photographs which resemble as closely as possible the description that you gave us. It hasn't been very easy. Sit down here. I want you to look at them one by one, carefully. Don't get excited. For that matter, you don't look like a man who does get excited. If you recognise your man definitely, that's an end of it. But you may find that you are not sure. Most of these photos are fairly good, but many of them are not recent. The man may have changed. Another thing that may happen is that you may have the impression that none of these heads here is your man, but that two or three are pretty close to his type, bordering upon it, so to speak. That in itself would help us. Well, let's get started."

"He's just pointed out to me," Quinette said to himself, "three ways in which I can get out of this. But the essential thing, above all, is that I should see clearly, right in front of my nose, the imaginary face which I described to them.

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For the moment I can't see anything but the lines on paper in which I described it. Folded up in my pocket. Unfortunately that's not quite the same thing."

He took the pack of photos which was handed to him. If he wanted contact with the police, he certainly had it now. This was something to make the heart of a neophyte beat faster. Before making a start he concentrated more intensely. He tried to fit the bits of a face which he had invented firmly against one another, to tighten them up, as you do in a printing-chase.

"Don't stop to think too long," the inspector said to him. "If necessary, you can stop to think afterwards. There's nothing so valuable as one's first impression."

Quinette looked at the photos one by one. To avoid pretending reactions which might ring false, he adopted the attitude of a man extremely sure of himself, for whose involuntary movements it is idle to watch out. To begin with, this would add to the policemen's respect for him; and he valued their respect.

While the heads slid over one another, revealed themselves, hid themselves, went back into the pack, all equally sinister and doomed, it seemed to him, to early contemplation of the guillotine some morning, the bookbinder exerted himself to classify them according to their degree of concordance with his imaginary description. It was not so easy. What attracted his intention every time, except in very few cases, was not the detail of the features, but the expression of the face as a whole, and even of the whole man through his face—the feeling of bitter ill will, of sourness, of defiance, which the head broadcast into space like an inexhaustible radiation.

"If I had ever seen them," he thought, "if I had ever set eyes on any one of them, I should recognise him imme-

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diately. What it comes to is that a description doesn't amount to much. It only counts when it applies to somebody who is part of the usual quarry of the police. Even then the search has to be in the right direction."

He came to the end of the pack.

"Well, nothing doing?" asked the inspector.

The bookbinder stroked his beard. He took his time. He was not sure yet what he was going to say. There were three possible replies. He found it pleasant to reflect that the whole sequence of events depended upon his whim. They were there in front of him like bunches of grapes, each appetising in its own way. He had only to open his mouth to enjoy whichever he chose. Which should he choose? At that moment caution had more difficulty in making its voice heard than his taste for the dramatic, his longing for the utmost possible excitement.

"I could point out one of these men, just as though I were the finger of God. I could be quite definite. An exciting sequel, in any case. . . ."

But suppose there were a trap? Suppose the policemen, to make sure of his good faith, had slipped into the pack a few photos of men who were dead or had been in prison for months?

"I find myself very much perplexed, gentlemen. One of these photos has a disquieting resemblance to the man who came to my place. Disquieting, but not convincing."

"Which one?"

"Wait a moment. . . ."

He had not yet chosen one. He spread out the pack again. Between finger and thumb he picked one out, at random, as a child, after hesitating a long time, suddenly decides upon one out of a number of cakes in a shop. He pushed it across the table.

“ This one.”

It was his turn to spy upon the police. There was nothing suspicious about their reaction. They, too, seemed to be interrogating the photo and interrogating themselves.

“ None of the others gives you the same impression ? ”

“ None. But I repeat that it’s not a very decided impression.”

The inspector glanced at his colleague ; then he went on :

“ Have you got five minutes more to spare ? ”

“ Certainly.”

“ Then would you just step into the next room, monsieur ? I’ll send for you again in a moment.”

Quinette found himself back in the room where he had been a few minutes before, which served as a waiting-room. He sat down on a bench. Perhaps he felt a vague sense of alarm ; but this alarm itself made up a part of the extreme interest which at this moment he felt in being alive. It was one of the elements in a bundle.

The inspector opened the door and summoned him : “ Monsieur.”

In the little office the other policeman was now standing up.

“ Are you at liberty this evening ? ” he asked.

His tone of voice was measured ; his intentions impenetrable. Quinette summoned up all his common sense to still the surge of panic that washed over his body.

“ This evening ? . . . It’s not very convenient. . . . To begin with, I haven’t had dinner yet. . . .”

“ Oh! you could have dinner with us.”

What did that mean ? Have a couple of dishes brought in to him from a neighbouring restaurant, as they do with people detained at a police-station, while elsewhere, in a magistrate’s office, they are taking out a warrant for their

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arrest? Unlikely. Contrary to all probability. Unless Leheudry had been pinched that very afternoon and had made a statement? In that case the clairvoyance of the police, the ability and the rapidity of their investigations, far exceeded the bookbinder's previous idea of them and, indeed, exceeded any explanation that his mind could imagine. Quinette felt germinating in him that semi-supernatural idea about the police which haunts the dreams of bad characters and invests the police in their eyes with all the fascination of divinity. But he was not so simple-minded as that. He fought down this confused imagining.

He pretended to take the invitation to dinner as a well-meant joke. He replied, with a laugh :

“Thanks, gentlemen . . . thanks very much. . . .”

“I'm speaking quite seriously. We can go and have something to eat together, all three of us, within the next few minutes, if you are hungry, and then—— No, better not. It would be better to start as soon as we can and eat when we have time. We have just been telephoning. There's a chance, at about this time, that we may find the man whose photo you picked out in a certain place. You could look at him at your ease. You could tell us : ‘That's he,’ or ‘That's not he,’ and the question would be settled one way or the other.”

Quinette felt more and more reassured from one sentence to the next.

“Oh yes, I see.”

“It may not be a method of procedure which is quite in accordance with police regulations. But when one is dealing with an intelligent and responsible man like yourself, it's a thing we can quite well do. If I save the examining magistrate some work, he won't hold it against me. And so far as dinner is concerned, the least I can do is to invite

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you, when I am putting you to all this trouble."

To take part in a police expedition, even if it led to a mare's nest, on this footing of equality, almost of comradeship—nothing could answer better to Quinette's secret desires. He was burning to accept. But he had promised to rejoin Leheudry before half-past seven. Leheudry was under definite instructions not to stir until that time. The bookbinder was late already. Half-past seven. The Métro would not take him there fast enough. He would have to reconcile himself to the expense of a taxi. The important thing was not to give Leheudry the smallest pretext for a breach of discipline.

"I'm really very sorry, gentlemen ; but I have an appointment which I am bound to keep. I couldn't foresee this. Give me until nine o'clock. After that I shall be entirely at your disposal."

"Very well. We'll try to make other arrangements. Come to the Quai des Orfèvres about nine o'clock. Go in through the entrance which opens directly on to the quay. The one that leads to the First President's Court. Remember the name. We shall be waiting for you there, my colleague and I. If we are late, wait for us a minute. Tell the door-keeper that you have an appointment with Monsieur Lespinas."

\* \* \*

"He's a fellow who's never there. Always on the wing. You can't have any confidence in him. No strength of character. A ne'er-do-well. It's true that it's seven thirty-two. But I didn't meet him on the way. He must have been gone some time."

Despite his dislike of doing so, the bookbinder had to address himself to the concierge.

"Oh yes, your clerk left a note for you with me."

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The note was carefully folded up, like those little packets of salts that you buy at chemists. Inside there were three lines in a handwriting that was not too bad, but overladen with twists and twirls.

"Having waited for you until past the time, I am going to have a drink in the rue des Récollets, the second bar on the right.

All the "t's" were capital letters, and so was the "b" of "bar."

Once he was outside, Quinette let his wrath explode.

"Everything was going so well! I should be happy if it wasn't for him."

As he walked round the Est station, he had his fists clenched all the time.

In the rue des Récollets his mere anger led him without any hesitation to the badly lit front of a wine-shop, just as a starving dog runs straight to a rabbit-hole. He opened the door, walked straight into the bar, saw Leheudry sitting at a table at the first glance, tapped him on the shoulder—"Hallo, are you coming?"—turned around again, and walked out; all this so decidedly and so quickly that the other customers scarcely had time to see the back of him. He waited for Leheudry a few steps further on, in the direction of the canal.

Leheudry came along in no hurry.

"You don't care a damn about what I say," Quinette began.

"Maybe I don't. You're not going to shut me up like that from morning till night. I've had enough of it."

The printer's face had an expression of rebelliousness intermingled with fear.

"What's that you say? What's that you have the nerve to say to me? I spend all my time looking after you. I

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go from one end of Paris to the other, God knows how many times a day, all for your sake. I take steps, and extremely dangerous ones, which you don't even know anything about. And not only do you disobey all the instructions I give you, but——”

“ Instructions, eh? Why, this is worse than prison! Let me tell you that I'd sooner go to prison.”

“ You fool! Don't shout like that. You fool! ”

Quinette blurted the words right into his face, through clenched teeth, in the darkness of the street.

“ Fool, am I? ” the other repeated. “ Nobody's got any brains but yourself, I suppose. And look what you do with them. Shutting me up like that! Making away with a man! ”

Leheudry shrugged his shoulders.

“ I tell you that it will drive me mad. This can't go on.”

“ Oh, you think it can't go on, do you? ”

Quinette treated Leheudry's neck to the hardest possible stare out of his deep-set eyes. Then his stare shifted along his neck. It drew around his neck the equivalent of one of those charcoal lines that serve to guide a saw. Quinette became conscious of the analogy, and it pleased him. He realised that this was a pleasure best enjoyed in silence. He managed to keep quiet.

The two men reached the bank of the Saint-Martin canal.

“ Where are you taking me to? ” asked the printer.

His tone of voice was already a little more humble.

“ Where am I taking you to? Nowhere in particular. I want something to eat. I'm looking for a place.”

“ You won't find any place here.”

“ What do you know about it? ”

“ You'll find one around the station, or in the faubourg Saint-Martin ; but not here along the canal.”

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"Yes, I shall. There are little taverns where bargees get meals and where we shall be alone at this time of day."

At long intervals a strong lamp shed a dreary light on the quay, the colour of sand. But this same light, as it fell down the bank upon the water of the canal, created oily mirrors and depths in it.

They walked along a couple of yards away from the edge, Quinette on the left, Leheudry on the side nearest the water. Leheudry, though he showed no uneasiness, kept moving over towards the left; but Quinette, imperceptibly, kept on edging him back towards the right. Sometimes the uneven edge of a paving-stone, or a mooring-ring, came in their way.

Quinette was not feeling angry any longer. The place where they were seemed to him in some obscure way favourable, made his heart beat faster, disturbed him with a kind of promise of pleasure, just as places consecrated to physical love disturb the novice who enters them, by their setting and their emanations. The effect upon the bookbinder was to give him a state of feeling much more intense, more lyrical, than mere well-being. Through it ran thoughts agile as dreams, but in appearance as cold as calculations. Their cruel precision lost nothing by letting themselves be carried along by this kind of musical exaltation.

"His foot might hit against a paving-stone. His foot might catch in a ring. How could he save himself? Scarcely a stagger. Preferably at the edge of a lock. A sheer drop. A big splash in the water. . . ."

But Leheudry was walking along pretty carefully, avoiding any obstacles. It would be difficult for him to lose his footing, all by himself. Could he swim? His clothes would hamper him. The water was cold. There were places where the canal was embanked. A slippery wall.

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The skin was scraped off your hands in vain ; and you had to go on swimming. You might cry for help, but you would have no breath left.

“ Nobody about. Myself the only witness. It would be all over. I shouldn’t have to keep an eye on him any longer, or worry about him, or waste my time over him. Who would care if he disappeared ? For all practical purposes, he has disappeared already. Who does care ? That plump little person in the rue Vandamme. Easy. A few more visits to her. Just to keep the story going. Bring it to an end somehow. I should have plenty of time for all that.

“ My appointment on the Quai des Orfèvres. I’m going to keep it, in any case. Cordiality, courtesy, mutual respect. I might really put them on a scent. Further rendezvous. Consultations, exchanges of ideas. My scrupulous moderation. How pleasant the future might be, if only I had not to drag this fellow along with me like a fetter ! Pity ? Did he show any ? He’s a criminal. If he could have got me arrested instead of himself. . . . That bloody rag folded up in the jacket.

“ Yes, but the canal gives up its dead, sooner or later. ‘ Found floating between two barges.’ Or else : ‘ A bargee on board the *Hirondelle* fished it up by chance with his boat-hook.’ The morgue. Identification ? Perhaps. Hypothesis of a crime. Inquiry about the criminal and the motive. Endless complications. Danger. That plump little person talking about my visit : the ‘ bearded lawyer.’ Might even go so far, in her flurry, as to confess about the safe. Terrible danger. . . .”

On the opposite bank was to be seen the lighted front of a bar-room. Leheudry pointed it out to him.

“ Well, won’t that suit you ? ”

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"We'll see. Anyway, we have to go on to the next bridge. . . ."

Quinette did not want to let go so soon of the enjoyment which his dreaming gave him. It was a dreaming which required certain propitious conditions around it. It was a dreaming which would lose some of its strength if it had not the support of the very circumstance in which he was living. A dreaming whose charm was that it walked step by step with reality ; just as Leheudry was walking along the bank of the canal ; a dreaming which had only one movement to make to turn into reality.

"Suicide. . . . Yes, suicide. Solution of all the difficulties at once. 'The body of the murderer in the rue Dailloud has just been found.' Killed himself. Suppose, this very night, I sent a letter signed by him to the coroner, or to a local police superintendent—the one in the neighbourhood where he used to live. 'It was I who killed the old woman. I am gnawed by remorse. I am going to commit suicide.' Two or three details about the crime, to clinch matters. In his own style. With the note that I have in my pocket, I could manage to imitate his handwriting pretty well. Besides, would they take the trouble to submit it to experts ? Will they have any other piece of his writing, even ? Not too marked a dissimilarity from his own—that's all that's required. I bet I could do that all right.

"When I leave the Quai des Orfèvres, I go and sit down in the back room of a deserted café. I make up the letter. I throw it into some out-of-the-way letter-box, where there is no collection after eight or nine o'clock at night. No indication about the method of suicide. The police get the letter to-morrow ; and they pay more or less attention to it. The papers have only a couple of lines about it. They must get a number of letters like that, from crazy people and

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practical jokers, in the course of an investigation. They make general inquiries about this Leheudry. I don't give any address for him in the letter. The investigation goes on in other directions. In a fortnight a bargee fishes up the body. Everything agrees. Everything is explained. The case is closed."

To tell the truth, that thought : "the case is closed," gave Quinette as much regret as relief. What would become of him, into what morass of boredom would he slip back, once the case was closed ? He felt the contact of his electric belt, its faithful clinging. Had he still got faith in this apparatus ? Scarcely. But he hesitated to separate himself from it. He no longer expected any definite support from it. But if he put it aside, he would be afraid of something like the vengeance of a woman whom you have deserted.

The quay was blocked by sacks of cement. They would have to leave the waterside. The bridge was close ahead. They might go and have a bite to eat at the wine-shop whose lights were shining opposite. Only stay about ten minutes. Just long enough to get Leheudry to drink a glass of wine, or even a whole bottle. Then a glass of spirits, to wind up with. After that they could continue along the canal, on the other bank. A man who has drunk a whole bottle of wine, in ten minutes, without eating much, and a glass of spirits afterwards, loses his footing very easily. If he falls into the water, the cold gets him and gives him a heart-attack. He sinks without a struggle.

"And suppose I gave him a violent shove at the right moment, what would happen ? I'm not very strong ; but neither is he, especially when he has had something to drink. I should have to get him quite close to the water, and at the same time take him completely off his guard. The danger, the difficulty that still remains insoluble, is that

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plump little woman in the rue Vandamme. I made a very bad mistake in having anything to do with her. It would have been such a splendid arrangement otherwise."

Quinette reflected about the problem of crime in general. Compared with crime, any other activities in life are relatively easy. They can be reconciled with many negligences, many errors of detail. The mind is not bound to keep before it all the time, with rigorous clearness, all the ins and outs of an action, without overlooking a single one of them. Sometimes it may even drowse, like a waggoner over easy stages of his road. Anybody coming the other way and meeting him does not mind very much ; and, even if he does, his power of offence cannot be exercised freely. Society protects people against one another in myriad ways, checks their mutual pursuit, and prevents your adversary from making the most of your mistakes. But when society is itself your adversary, it recognises no tempering of the wind, no neutral ground. Out of your smallest slip it makes a slip-knot which will hang you.

So it is not surprising that so few crimes are undertakings which turn out well. The less so in that most of those who commit them are people with some kind of flaw. They lack brains or strength of character, often both together. They act in obedience to the baser passions. They have a taste for blood, or, if not, at least a horror of regular work, an ingrained idleness. In short, they are, quite simply, criminals. Whereas there might be "authors of crime."

"I might make up a second letter for the rue Vandamme. Good-bye to the lady-love. She is too much of a fool to notice any difference in the writing. Besides, emotion would blind her eyes. There remain the safe and the parcel. . . . How can a man as well endowed as I am come to commit a crime ? Because he makes up his mind, at a given

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moment, that crime is the most logical way out. I don't like that word 'crime.' I don't quite see what it answers to. The parcel in the safe. I must get hold of that at all costs. The letter might contain one last request : 'I beg you to hand over the parcel to my lawyer.' No more precise reference. No confession. Simply : 'I am killing myself to escape dishonour. I have entrusted my lawyer with clearing my memory. In the name of all you hold most sacred, help him.' "

As he said these words inside himself, he looked at the man to whom he was lending them, who was walking in silence beside him. The printer's face was beginning to catch the light from the inn, now much nearer and stronger than any street-lamp. The pockets under his grey eyes looked like marks left by an executioner's thumb on flesh already mortified.

On the glass of the front was a sign : "The Boatman of Lizy," and "Refreshments at all hours."

"Are we going in ?" asked Leheudry.

And Quinette rediscovered his usual courtesy as he replied : "Yes, certainly, if you like."

*(To be continued)*

## QUINETTE'S CRIME

### *Synopsis of previous instalments :*

It is the 6th of October, 1908. Suburban Paris goes to work.

Juliette Ezzelin goes into the shop of Quinette, the bookbinder, and leaves a book with him. He makes an odd impression upon her. On her way back, she notices, in an alley, a man flattening himself curiously against the wall. This man, a few minutes later, bursts into Quinette's shop and asks if he may have a wash. His hands, his clothes, are stained with blood. Quinette prevails upon this man to meet him that evening, at ten minutes to six, in the rue Saint-Antoine.

He then takes a turn around the district where the man lives, to find out whether there is any talk about a crime committed in the neighbourhood. Shall he hand the man over to the police or not?

A little later he goes to his rendezvous in the rue Saint-Antoine. He meets his man of the morning, who, by a complicated itinerary, takes him to the back room of a little wine-shop in the Jewish quarter. Quinette extracts a half-confession of his crime from him, obtains some details intermingled with evasions, and offers him his advice and assistance. The bookbinder follows the suspected murderer to the hiding-place which he has chosen, in the rue Taillepain. They talk. How is the other to side-track suspicion? How is his trunk to be got out of the hotel where he left it? Quinette discovers a way out. But an incident reveals the fundamental dishonesty of the stranger, whose name he finds is Leheudry.

A week later the newspapers announce that in a hovel in the Vaugirard district the body of an old woman, murdered about a week ago, has just been discovered. Juliette goes to fetch her book. The job is not finished. Quinette has other things on his mind. Since that morning, when he read the news and realised that the crime has been discovered, he has been thinking out a plan of action. He begins by making a careful inspection of Leheudry's trunk.

Quinette goes off to meet Leheudry, finds him in a bar, takes him inside Saint-Merri's Church, and questions him. The interrogation is continued in a café. The bookbinder learns that Leheudry has entrusted the "swag" to Sophie Parent, who keeps a stationery-shop.

Quinette visits the scene of the crime. He learns that the concierge caught a glimpse of Leheudry. Early in the afternoon he goes to see Sophie Parent and persuades her to hand over to him the key of the safe where she is keeping the swag. Next day, consumed with desire to discover how much the police know about the crime, Quinette calls at the local police station and suggests that he might be able to help find the murderer.

## Our Contributors

A. G. MACDONELL is the son of Doctor W. R. Macdonell, formerly managing director of the Bombay Company, and LL.D. of Aberdeen University, and grandson of Doctor J. F. White, the famous art collector and critic, and Greek scholar, also LL.D. of the same University. He served during the War with the Artillery of the 51st Highland Division, and spent two years and a half in France. After the War, he worked with the Quakers, first in the reconstruction of the devastated areas in East Poland, and later in the valley of the Volga during the Great Famine. Then, after travelling extensively in Central Europe and the Balkans, he joined the staff of the League of Nations Union, and worked in the London office for five years, during which time he was private secretary to Professor Gilbert Murray, and, for a short time, to Doctor Nansen. His first book was published last year and called *England Their England* and his second, *Napoleon and His Marshals*, was published in January, 1934. He has twice stood for Parliament in the Liberal interest.

DESIDER KOSZTOLANYI, born 1885, the greatest imaginative novelist of present-day Hungary, was originally a poet, who gave voice to the neurasthenia of the modern intellectual and also a gifted interpreter of modern French and English authors. Childhood was one of his favourite subjects, to which he devoted a whole cycle of poems—*Complaints of The Poor Little Child*. He is a great stylist combining the æolian harp-sensitivity of H. M. Tomlinson with the wit and magnificent sense of the comic of René Clair. His novel *Nero*, which portrays the mad Emperor as a poet, gained wide recognition for its author. It was translated into many languages, including English (1926), but his critics agree that his greatest book so far is *Anna Edes*, the story of a servant girl. The story here published appeared in a volume of short stories which are linked together by their hero *Cornelius Esti*, writer, philanderer and sage, who relates his unusual adventures.

The translator, Mr. Adam de Hegedus, is a critical contributor to *The Observer*.

L. A. G. STRONG, three parts mixed Irish and one part West Country English, owes much to this mongrelism, which has not only mingled Celt and Saxon in his blood, but has made him free of two distinct backgrounds. He was educated at Brighton College, from where he went as a classical scholar to Wadham College, Oxford. Beginning to write verse, and later short stories, he waited till he was thirty-three before publishing his first novel. His short stories have appeared in a number of periodicals here and in America, and he has been five times represented in Edward J. O'Brien's "Best Short Stories of the Year" series. Three volumes of his short stories have been issued, and a fourth is likely to appear during the next twelve months.

MARCEL AYMÉ, the author of this modern fairy tale, is one of the most brilliant and promising young French writers. His last book, *The Green Mare*—a vast Rabelaisian burst of laughter—has sold over 100,000 copies and is still selling at the rate of 200 a week. He is also the author of *La Rue Sans Nom*, from which a film of the same name has been made and which is at present being shown in Paris, London, and other cities with great success. Aymé is a master of the short story and among his five published books is one of very original contributions to this literary form.

SEÁN O'FAOLÁIN was born in Cork in 1900. He graduated at the National University of Ireland. As a result of his experiences during the Irish "troubles" he reacted strongly against politics and especially all forms of propaganda. He went to Harvard as Commonwealth Fellow in 1926, took a degree there, and was made a John Harvard Fellow in 1928. Abandoning scholarship, politics and teaching, he is now writing happily about them all. He has published a volume of short stories, *Midsummer Night Madness*, and a novel *A Nest of Simple Folk*. He is now completing a biography of Countess Markievicz, the unconventional blue-stocking, who shocked Edwardian Dublin by turning revolutionary. He is a member of the Irish Academy of Letters.

L. A. PAVEY is a Civil Servant, born and living in London. He has published a novel *Mr. Line*, but is chiefly interested in the short story, and is one of the editorial board of *New Stories*. His work has appeared in *The Manchester Guardian*, *The Criterion*, *Life and Letters*, and in *The Best Short Stories of 1927 and 1932* and other anthologies.

JACK GRIFFITH is thirty-two years of age. He ran away from school to join the Navy during the war, and has been, among other things, a fitter, miner, surveyor, Relieving officer, tramp, lieutenant in the Territorial Army, deckhand on a trawler, special policeman, and on the "dole." He went back to school at twenty-eight years of age, and is now completing his degree at a Welsh University. Having seen people suffer, he has decided to become a parson in the hope of helping others. He plays forward at Rugby and is an amateur heavy-weight boxer. Six weeks ago he had the biggest hiding he ever received in the ring.

LAURENCE HOLEBECK was born not far from the scene depicted in *The Spy*; in Weardale, the hilly pastoral country in the west of the County of Durham. The plot of the story occurred to him as the result of the discovery, in that district, a few years ago, of the body of a soldier in eighteenth-century regimentals, which had been perfectly preserved by the peat-moss in which it was found.

Mr. Holebeck was educated at one of the Northern Public Schools, and at Oxford, which he left in 1925 to take up a position at a Scottish University. Since then he has been called to the English Bar. One of his recreations is travelling in Europe; he is particularly interested in the Balkans. He also made, in 1922-23, a tour of the United States and the West Indies, dividing his time in the former among New England, the South and California.

JULES ROMAINS, as Mr. Gerald Gould has recently remarked, is a figure of European fame. *Men of Goodwill*, described by M. André Maurois as "a great book not only in size but also in its truth and poetry" was first published in English last autumn. A further volume, *Childhoods Loves* was published last month. The story of Quinette the Bookbinder is but one of the threads of a vast human tapestry.